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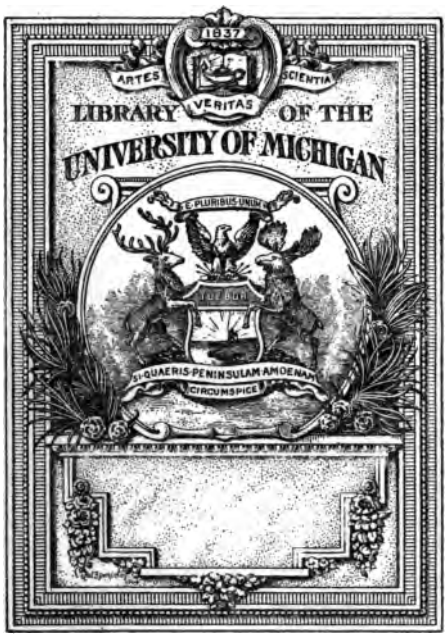
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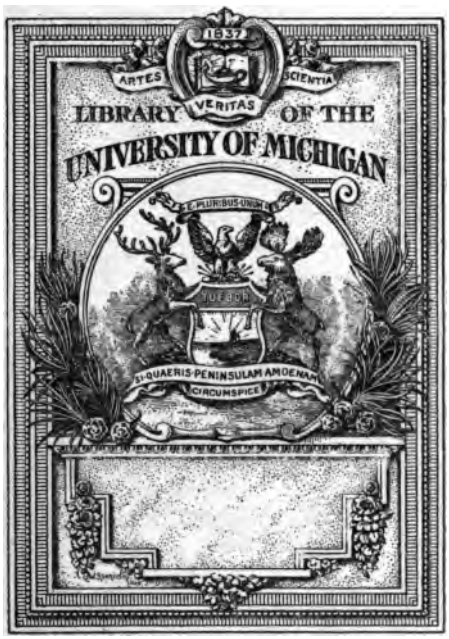
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THE MOST GORGEOUS LADY BLESSINGTON

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BY

J. FITZGERALD MOLLOY

AUTHOR OF

'COURT LIFE BELOW STAIRS,' 'THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF PEG WOFFINGTON,' 'THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF EDMUND KEAN,' 'ROYALTY RESTORED, OR LONDON UNDER CHARLES II.,' 'FAMOUS PLAYS,' 'THE FAITHS OF THE PEOPLES,' ETC.

WITH A PORTRAIT OF LADY BLESSINGTON

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

THIRD EDITION

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THE MOST GORGEOUS LADY BLESSINGTON

CHAPTER I

Lady Blessington becomes an Author by Profession—Visit from S. C. Hall—Her Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron—The Countess Guiccioli visits London—Writes to Lady Blessington concerning Byron—Marriage of Mary Anne Power—Landor comes to England—Introduces Henry Crabbe Robinson to Lady Blessington—His Impressions—Anecdotes of Dr Parr—Publishing a Novel—Lady Blessington edits the Book of Beauty

IT soon became evident to Lady Blessington that on an income of two thousand a year, she could not maintain her household in its present splendour, which her love of the luxurious and her sensitiveness to surroundings made her unwilling to alter: and at the same time support her father, her sister Mary Anne, and her brother now a married man

with a family, who, no longer agent for the Blessington estates, was then without employment. Therefore seeking some means by which she might increase her dower, her inclinations turned towards literature, which was not then, as now, the occupation of the million. Its adoption as a calling was moreover acceptable to her from the fact, that more than any other it was calculated to occupy her mind and prove a refuge from the melancholy reflections which circumstances forced upon her.

Some four years after her marriage to Lord Blessington she had produced a book called the *Magic Lantern*, containing sketches on such subjects as the park, the opera, and the auction room; and in 1823 whilst abroad had published a second volume entitled *Sketches and Fragments*, treating of marriage, egotism, sensibility, friendship, fastidiousness, etc. Both were smartly written and gave promise of talent, though neither proved a success: for from the first no profit was forthcoming, whilst from the sales of the second she had received but twenty pounds, which with characteristic generosity she gave to a charity.

Since that time her naturally receptive mind had widened by travel and intercourse with the world. She had read much and observed closely, and above all had profited by her intimate intercourse with such men as Byron, Landor, Lamartine, Herschel, Sir William Drummond and Sir William Gell.

She was now a woman of unusual culture, a delightful conversationalist, one who possessed in a rare degree the admirable gift of graphic narration; all of which qualities would prove highly serviceable to a writer.

There were already in the field such authors as Sir Walter Scott, Theodore Hook, Captain Marryat, Harrison Ainsworth, Bulwer, Disraeli, Charles Dickens, John Galt and William Godwin; and amongst her own sex such story-tellers as Maria Edgworth, Lady Morgan, Miss Mitford, Mrs S. C. Hall and Jane Porter. The poets included Wordsworth, Campbell, Coleridge, Barry Cornwall, Samuel Rogers, Tom Moore, Alfred Tennyson, Mrs Hemans, Miss Barrett, Miss Landon: and the essayists numbered Charles Lamb, De Quincey, Thomas Carlyle, and Landor. In every department of literature there seemed labourers enough already, yet room might be found for another. At this time Lady Blessington had no definite intention of joining the novelists' ranks. Verses, stories, and biographical sketches would come easier to her pen: but whilst a wide field of subjects to select from lay before her, no special design employed her mind. She felt assured however that she could furnish material for the periodicals, and already decided that the *New Monthly Magazine* would be the most desirable medium for a beginning.

This publication had been founded some ten years previously by Colburn, and had counted amongst its contributors the most

notable writers of the day. The first who filled the editorial chair was none other than Thomas Campbell, who though readable as a poet was execrable as an editor; he being a man under whose régime confusion reigned supreme, from whom contributors might hope in vain for answers; who apologised to his readers for 'inserting without reflection' an article which appeared in his pages, which on observing its unfairness 'made him feel dissatisfied with himself for having published it;' one who to use Talfourd's words 'stopped the press for a week to determine the value of a comma, and balanced contending epithets for a fortnight.'

In November 1831 Campbell was succeeded as editor by Bulwer, who was therefore responsible for the management of the magazine when in the spring of 1832 Lady Blessington wrote to offer her services as a contributor. The assistant editor was Samuel Carter Hall then a man of one-and-thirty, a writer of verse, a journalist, an editor, and more than all the husband of one who had published charming and racy stories of Irish life which had immediately brought her name before the public.

In reply to Lady Blessington's letter, S. C. Hall waited upon her and was shown into the drawing-room crowded with works of art, its deep embrasured windows looking on a fair garden. He had not been long here when the door was thrown open by a resplendent footman, and immediately after

Lady Blessington entered quietly and gracefully, that smile upon her face which was as witchery to all. His first impression was that she 'was remarkably handsome, not so perhaps by the established canons of beauty, but there was a fascination of look and manner that greatly augmented her personal charms. Her face and features were essentially Irish, and that is the highest compliment I can pay them,' he would add.

Her ardent admiration for talent, her delicate tact, her desire to please, prompted her to say many complimentary things regarding her richly-endowed countrywoman, Mrs Hall; words which were music to the ears on which they fell. Hostess and guest had much to say concerning the country which had given them birth; criticisms followed on the writers of the day—amongst whom he had many friends —finally they spoke of literature, a calling in which each was destined to become distinguished.

Lady Blessington proposed various subjects as suitable for treatment by her in the pages of the *New Monthly*, but none of them commended itself to the assistant editor. Then the conversation became desultory when he passed some comment on a picture of Byron hanging at a little distance. This led to reminiscences regarding the poet whom she described with fluency, recalling various opinions he had expressed to her, describing his traits of character and manners, the impressions he had given her.

'Now' said S. C. Hall who knew the interest felt by the public regarding the brilliant personality of Byron 'why not write what you have told me of the poet?'

Lady Blessington immediately accepted the suggestion, and promised to act upon it, and in this way her literary career may be said to have begun.

Whilst at Genoa, it will be remembered, she had seen Byron continually and he had spoken to her unreservedly on a variety of subjects. Each time he had left her presence, it had been her habit to jot down their conversations as fully as her excellent memory would permit. These records of his opinions and traits she had preserved, and at once began to transcribe and arrange them for the press. When ready they appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* under the heading 'Journals of Conversations with Lord Byron': the first instalment being published in July 1832, the last in December 1833, when they were issued in volume form.

The year 1832 was fruitful of events in Lady Blessington's life; for not only may she be said to have begun her literary career at this period, but she also arranged a marriage between her sister Mary Anne and a French nobleman, the Count Saint Marsault. Miss Power was at this time about thirty, whilst her husband was more than double her age. The Count was a distinguished-looking personage with a wicked eye and a charming smile, whose manners were the most polite and amiable imaginable. A man of rank, hand-

somely dressed, his long yellow fingers loaded with rings that were heirlooms, it was considered he had ample means to support himself and his wife in the position proper for them to maintain: an advantage which alone induced Mary Anne Power to accept his proposal, she being unwilling to remain any longer a burden on her sister, and anxious to gain independence even by the sacrifice of her feelings. On the other hand the Count believed that the sister of an English countess who lived in a style so magnificent, could not but have a handsome dowry.

Alas, the truth was known too late. The Count was well nigh as poor as his wife; and after living together for a few months during which they daily disagreed, they willingly separated: he returning to his own country and she at first to her sister until such time as she went to Dublin to take charge of her father; when in due course her place in Lady Blessington's household was supplied by her nieces, Marguerite and Ellen Power, the beautiful daughters of Lady Blessington's impecunious brother.

Her sister Ellen, who had married the Hon. Charles Manners Sutton, was far more fortunate. Her drawing-rooms were only less brilliant than those of Lady Blessington: whilst her grace and beauty were scarce second to the Countess. Between his scrambles from the receptions of a duchess to the concert of a marchioness, Tom Moore graciously found time to call upon Mrs Manners Sutton and in his

diary speaks of being amused to see her in state, in the Speaker's residence, the same hearty, lively Irishwoman still. He walked with her in the garden 'the moonlight on the river, the boats gliding along it, the towers of Lambeth on the opposite bank, the lights of Westminster bridge gleaming on the left, and then when one turned round to the house, that beautiful Gothic structure, illumined from within, and at that moment containing within it the council of the nation, all was most picturesque and striking.'

Another event which caused some sensation at this date, not alone to Lady Blessington but to her circle, was a visit paid to London by the Countess Guiccioli. For some years after Byron's death she had lived in great retirement with her father, and had subsequently taken up her residence in Paris. Her ancient husband was still amongst the living and a second marriage was therefore impossible to the Countess. As already stated, Lady Blessington had met her in Rome; and on the arrival of Madame Guiccioli in London on March 25th 1832, she had hastened to call at Seamore Place. Lady Blessington found her 'a very interesting person, gentle, amiable, and unhappy' and gladly welcomed her to her *salon*, where for several nights she proved a great attraction, all being eager to see and speak with the woman whose charms had captivated and kept Byron's capricious fancy.

He had desired her not to learn English, preferring that she should always address him in the delicious music of her native language;

but since his death she had acquired a knowledge of his tongue, and could understand what passed around and was addressed to her. With her large blue eyes, her blonde skin, and glorious red-gold hair, she was fair to look upon as seen in Lady Blessington's drawing-room, under the gracious patronage of her stately hostess who introduced her to those bidden to see so interesting a personage.

The Countess had no desire to disassociate herself from the memory and history of so fascinating and famous a man, but rather sunned herself in his posthumous fame. With gentle melancholy she spoke to them of him on whose stilled heart her miniature had been found, listened to their gracious speeches with delight, and accepted as homage the curiosity she excited. Her appearance on the scene was welcomely opportune at a moment when Lady Blessington's 'Conversations with Lord Byron' were exciting comment and discussion regarding the poet.

Scarcely had the Countess Guiccioli been a week in town before she visited Harrow school, a place inseparably connected with Lord Byron, where, as she expresses it, she 'enjoyed many melancholy pleasures' on being shown over the sights sacred to her lover's memory: her guide being the Rev. Henry Drury, who had been Master of Harrow School during Byron's time. When all places of interest were seen she spent the day with the Drury family. Later she visited Mrs

Leigh the poet's sister, with whom she passed three hours 'always speaking of him.' Mrs Leigh she considered the most amiable and good-natured person in the world; 'and besides poor Lord Byron was so fond of her, that she is a very interesting person for me,' wrote the Contessa.

Lady Blessington was naturally desirous to make her sketch of Byron as full and interesting as possible, and therefore asked Madame Guiccioli to send her some extracts from the letters he had written to her from Greece. This the Contessa refused, not on the ground that such communications were too sacred for publication, but because she herself intended one day to furnish the world with personal recollections of her lover.

'Perhaps' she says in the letter which contained her refusal 'you will blame me, but I cannot conceal from you that I have the greatest dislike to publish *now* any of Lord Byron's letters to me. One day or other they will be published, but the moment is not come yet. And also, don't you think my dear Lady Blessington, that if I were to give you extracts and names, don't you think that the malicious part, at least, of your readers, would say you were influenced by your friendship towards me, or by my entreaties to speak in honourable terms of Lord Byron's affection for me?

'This is so much my opinion, that I am convinced the world would give much more credit to everything honourable you will say

about Lord Byron, not only without my own extracts, etc., but still more, also, had you published it when you had no acquaintance with, or friendship for me. But upon all that, I will speak about with you, the first time I shall have the pleasure to see you. And if you like to see all Lord Byron's letters to me at every part of our acquaintance, I will show them to you with pleasure.

'Good evening, my dear Lady Blessington, and many thanks for all your kindness towards me.'

The instalments of the 'Conversations' in the *New Monthly* did not quite please Madame Guiccioli. The passages referring to herself were, as she acknowledged in a pretty little note, inspired by a sympathy which she did not merit: but regarding Byron she thought the writer too severe at times, especially regarding his life at Venice previous to the beginning of his last romance. *Comme il aimoit à se calomnier, il étoit bien lui la cause principale des fausses opinions qu'on entretenait de lui.*'

Lady Blessington's tactful reply to these comments drew from the Contessa the following letter written from Brighton, where she had gone, being unable to accustom herself 'to the dreadful noise of Piccadilly and to the English songs.'

'I received a note from you before my departure from London, which being a reply to the last of mine to you, I did not answer. I found your remarks on my critique true and reasonable, and for some of them at least, I

could have scarce any other thing to reply, but that you are right. Yes, you are right, my dear Lady Blessington, when you say that on account of my sensitiveness towards Lord Byron (which has its source not only in my exalted sense of his perfections, but in all the results of my experience of the world) I cannot be satisfied with any of his biographers. But if I ever shall give my own impressions of him to the public (which I look upon as a duty it remains for me to perform towards his memory, one day or other) I fear, my dear Lady Blessington, that instead of being received by the public with the interest you say, they would find I have seen Lord Byron through a medium of affection, and would laugh, perhaps, at what I feel so deeply in my heart.

'I am now living quite an English life, a quiet serious life, speaking all day the language of the English people; but I must confess, for an Italian this kind of life is a little too formal, too cold, has too much of restraint in it on the feelings, and makes me feel a kind of oppression upon my breast. I feel as if I could not breathe freely, and yet I have before my eyes the calm, wide, sublime ocean. I don't find here the beauties of the Mediterranean shores, the Bay of Naples with its smiling islands and its brilliant sky, but perhaps there is on this unlimited ocean a degree more of sublimity. It appears to me that it is calculated to inspire one with Ariosto's musings—that other with Byron's poetry.'

In the spring of this year another visitor

from abroad was warmly welcomed by Lady Blessington. This was Walter Savage Landor, with whom she had since their parting carried on a correspondence. He had come to England for the purpose of visiting his relatives and friends, with the intention of returning to Florence in the autumn. Soon after his arrival he called on the woman whose friendship he so highly valued, and their mutual pleasure was great. After years of absence from England, Landor desired to recall himself to various friends, and also to transact business which had much accumulated; so that he was unable to become her guest as frequently as Lady Blessington's hospitable and kindly heart desired.

Therefore in a letter, with which she forwarded an engraving of one of her portraits that it might sometimes remind him of the original, she complains of not seeing him more constantly.

'You are associated' she says 'in my memory with some of my happiest days; you were the friend, and the highly-valued friend, of my dear and lamented husband, and as such, even without any of the numberless claims you have to my regard, you could not be otherwise than highly esteemed. It appears to me that I have not quite lost him who made life dear to me, when I am near those he loved, and that knew how to value him.

'Five fleeting years have gone by since our delicious evenings on the lovely Arno, evenings never to be forgotten, and the recollections

of which ought to cement the friendships then formed. This effect I can in truth say, has been produced on me, and I look forward with confidence to keeping alive by a frequent correspondence, the friendship you owe me, no less for what I feel for you, than as the widow of one you loved, and that truly loved you. We, or more properly speaking I, live in a world where friendship is little known, and were it not for one or two individuals like yourself, I might be tempted to exclaim with Socrates "My friends, there are no friends." Let us prove that the philosopher was wrong, and if fate has denied us the comfort of meeting, let us by letters keep up our friendly intercourse. You will tell me what you think and feel in your Tuscan retirement, and I will tell you what I do in the modern Babylon, where thinking and feeling are almost unknown.

'Have I not reason to complain, that in your sojourn in London, you do not give me a single day? And yet methinks you promised to stay a week, and that of that week I should have my share. I rely on your promise of coming to see me again before you leave London, and I console myself for the disappointment of seeing so little of you, by recollecting the welcome and the happiness that wait you at home. Long may you enjoy it is the sincere wish of your attached friend.

'I shall be glad to hear what you think of the 'Conversations.' I could have made them better, but they would no longer have been what they now are, genuine.'

Most of Landor's relatives lived in Bath and its neighbourhood where he spent the summer months, but he was back in town in September on his way homewards, when he became Lady Blessington's constant guest. In that month he brought with him an old friend, Henry Crabbe Robinson, whom he introduced to the Countess.

Robinson who was at this time in his fifty-seventh year, had practised at the Bar, and had afterwards acted as foreign editor of the *Times*. A man of wealth he had travelled and during his active life made the friendship of such people as Goethe, Flaxman, William Blake, Charles Lamb, Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey, Madame de Staël, and indeed most of the celebrities of his time, many of whom he entertained at his famous breakfasts. Lady Blessington was not the less pleased with this gracious and interesting man, than he was with her, and in his diary he speaks of her as a charming and remarkable person who has left on him a delightful impression. He compares her to a Countess Egloffstein, but declares his hostess was far more handsome, though 'their countenance, manners, and particularly the tone of voice belong to the same class.'

Lady Blessington's dress he describes as rich and her library most splendid. 'Her book about Lord Byron, now publishing by driblets in the *New Monthly Magazine*, and her other writings give her in addition the character of a *bel esprit*. Landor too says that

she was to Lord Blessington the most devoted wife he ever knew. He says also that she was by far the most beautiful woman he ever saw. She is now, Landor says, about thirty, but I should have thought her older. She is a great talker but her talk is rather narrative than declamatory, and very pleasant. She and Landor were both intimate with Dr Parr, but they had neither of them any *mot* of the doctor to relate to match several that I told them of. him; indeed in the way of *bon mots* I heard only one in the evening worth copying. I should have said there were with Lady Blessington her sister, a Countess St Marsault, and a handsome Frenchman of stately person who speaks English well — Count D'Orsay. He related of Madame de Staël whose character was discussed, that one day, being on a sofa with Madame Récamier, one who placed himself between them exclaimed, "*Me voila entre la beauté et l'esprit*," Madame de Staël replied "That is the first time I was ever complimented for beauty." Madame Récamier was thought the handsomest woman in Paris, but was by no means famed for *esprit*.

'Nearly the whole of the conversation was about Lord Byron, to whose name perhaps Lady Blessington's will be attached when her beauty survives only in Sir Thomas Laurence's painting and in engravings. She however is by no means an extravagant admirer of Lord Byron. The best thing left by Lord Byron with Lady Blessington is a copy of a letter written by him in the name of Fletcher,

giving an account of his own death and of his abuse of his friends: humour and irony mingled with unusual grace.'

One of the anecdotes told regarding the learned Dr Parr was, that on hearing a young man scoff at religion, and make fun of the story of Balaam's ass and its cross, he turned to him impressively and said 'It would be well sir if you had less of the ass and more of the cross.' And on another occasion when the doctor was aggravated by a youth who, confident in his opinions, strongly advanced them, Parr said to him, 'You are a young man, you have read much, thought little, and know nothing at all.'

Before the year was out Henry Crabbe Robinson called again on Lady Blessington, to whose receptions he was given a general invitation. 'Old Jekyll was with her' he narrates. 'He recognised me and I stayed in consequence a considerable time.' He found the conversation 'various, anecdotic, and several matters were related worth recollecting.' No man could be more amusing, courteous, and entertaining than Jekyll. In speaking of Lady Blessington's literary abilities he declared that Fortune was a fickle jade, for she might have contented herself in bestowing beauty, but she grew extravagant and threw talents and taste into the bargain. Then when the talk turned on Lord Erskine who used to hestitate very much in his delivery, and could not speak well after dinner, Jekyll narrated that he dined with his lordship once at the

Fishmongers' Company, 'and he made such sad work of speechifying that I asked him whether it was in honour of the company that he floundered so.'

What most amused Henry Crabbe Robinson on this occasion was the reading by Lady Blessington of 'a ridiculously absurd letter from an American, suggesting that a monument should be raised to Bryon, to be built of flint and brass and covered with great names. Lady Blessington was asked to contribute an Andenken in return for which she was promised that her name should have a prominent place.'

Though as she tells a correspondent she had now all the horrors of authorship on her hands, and had not an hour to call her own by day, whilst at night she retired to bed so fatigued as to be unable to sleep, yet she found time to write letters to her friends when they needed advice or sympathy. For example when through loss of speculations and breaking health, ill fortune was beginning to darken the life of the elder Charles Mathews, she wrote his wife the following kindly letter:—

'It is strange my dearest friend, but it is no less strange than true, that there exists some hidden cord of sympathy, "some lightening of the mind" that draws kindred souls towards each other when the bodies are separated. I have been for the last four days thinking so much of you, that had this day been tolerable, I should have gone to you, as

I had a thousand misgivings that something was wrong, when lo, your little note arrives, and I find that you too have been thinking of your absent friend.

'I shall be glad to hear that Mr Mathews is returned and in better health and spirits. I feel all that you had to undergo; that wear and tear of mind, that exhausts both nerves and spirits is more pernicious in its effects than greater trials. The latter call forth our energies to bear them, but the former wear us out without leaving even the self-complacency of resisted shocks. I shall be most glad to see you again, and to tell you that in nearness as in distance your affection is the cable that holds the sheet-anchor, and reconciles me to a world where I see much to pity and little to console.'

Towards the end of this year and whilst her 'Conversations' were yet attracting much attention, she set about writing a novel, her first serious effort in this department of literature. The book which chiefly dealt with Irish politics was called *The Repealers*, and when published in June 1833, was favourably received by the press. Her personal friends hastened to applaud her efforts, and amongst the letters received from them relative to *The Repealers*, was a characteristic effusion from Walter Savage Landor, which ran as follows:—

'I am inclined to hope and believe that *The Repealers* may do good. Pardon me smiling at your expression, the only one per-

haps not original in the book, *going to the root of the evil.* This is always said about the management of Ireland. Alas the root of the evil lies deeper than the centre of the earth.

'Two things must be done and done soon. It must be enacted that any attempt to separate one part of the United Kingdom from the other is treason. Secondly, no churchman, excepting the two archbishops and the Bishop of London, shall enjoy more than twelve hundred pounds yearly from the Church, the remainder being vested in Government for the support of the poor. Formerly the clergy and the poor were joint tenants; nay, the clergy distributed amongst the poor more than half. Even in the territories of the Pope himself, the bishoprics, one with another, do not exceed eight hundred a year, and certainly a fifth at least is distributed among the needy. What a scandal that an admiral who has served fifty years and endangered his life in fifty actions, should receive but a twentieth part of what is thrown into the surplice of some cringing college tutor, whose services two hundred a year would overpay. I am afraid that Sir Robert Peel's quick eye may overlook this. Statesmen, like goats, live the most gaily among inequalities.'

Lady Blessington was daily becoming more absorbed by literature, a pursuit which had the desired effect of occupying her thoughts and adding to her income: for not only was she a contributor to the *New Monthly*, the author

of a novel, but in this year 1833 she was appointed to the editorship of the *Book of Beauty*, one of the forerunners of the modern annuals. For some time previous Christmas gift-books had become the fashion: the first of these having been introduced from Germany into England in 1822 by Ackerman the publisher, and called *Forget-me-Not*. A year later he issued *Friendship's Offering*. These productions which contained poems and sketches whose worthlessness would now prevent their admission into the poorest of our magazines, were fairly well illustrated, interleaved with sheets of blank paper, bound in tinted wrappers of the same material, and sold for twelve shillings.

Their success begot competition, and with rivalry they improved. In 1824 Alaric Watts edited *The Literary Souvenir*, next year S. C. Hall edited *The Amulet* for Baynes of Paternoster Row; later still came *The Scenic Annual* edited by Thomas Campbell; *Tableaux or Picturesque Scenes of National Character, Beauty and Costume* edited by Mary Russell Mitford; *The Court Journal* edited by the Hon. Mrs Norton; *The Gem* edited by Tom Hood; *The Anniversary* edited by Allan Cunningham; Heath's *Book of Beauty* edited by L. E Landon; and *The Keepsake* first edited by Mansel Reynolds and afterwards by the Countess of Blessington.

In one year no less than seventeen of these annuals were published. The rapid improvement they made in art and literature was

appreciated by the public with whom for a time they became extremely popular. At first the annuals were mainly contributed to by people of rank and fashion, interest in whose social position it was hoped, would compensate for their lack of talent: but later it was found necessary to secure the production of distinguished and popular writers to whom large prices were paid. For instance Sir Walter Scott received five hundred pounds for a contribution to *The Keepsake*, and Tom Moore was offered six hundred pounds for one hundred and twenty lines of prose or verse by the editor of the same publication. Theodore Hook first published his sketch The Splendid Annual—The Lord Mayor of London —in *The Anniversary;* the Dream of Eugene Aram first appeared in *The Gem;* whilst Walter Savage Landor wrote some of his Imaginary Conversations for the *Book of Beauty.*

The art department also made rapid strides towards perfection. Painters were now paid from twenty to a hundred and fifty pounds for permission to have their works produced. In one instance the publishers of *The Amulet* paid twelve hundred guineas for the use and the engraving of the plates it contained: and strange to say this number was the most profitable they published. The binding of the annuals kept pace with their contents; tinted paper was no longer used, it being discarded for silk of gorgeous colours; silk in time giving place to velvet and morocco

leather. The price which began at twelve shillings bounded to a guinea on the first issue of *The Keepsake;* whose second number, it may be stated, cost its proprietors sixteen hundred pounds.

With the editorship of the *Book of Beauty* a new phase may be said to have begun in Lady Blessington's life; a phase fuller of interest and event, than those which had gone before.

CHAPTER II

Lady Blessington's Circle widens—Young Disraeli —The Effects of *Vivian Grey*—A Strange Illness—Correspondence with Bulwer—Criticisms of the Young Duke—Travel and Adventures— A Psychological Romance—An Extraordinary Figure—Meeting the Great Ones of the Earth— The Reading of a Revolutionary Epic—As for Love?

As editor of the *Book of Beauty*, Lady Blessington was brought into correspondence and connection not only with authors, poets, and essayists, but likewise with artists, engravers, publishers, editors, and critics. Her circle widened, became richer in variety, losing nothing of the old it gained by the new. She now made the acquaintance and subsequently gained the friendship of such men as Bulwer, Macready, actor and manager; the elder Disraeli and his brilliant son Benjamin; Barry Cornwall, Captain Marryat, the poet Campbell, Harrison Ainsworth; Albany Fonblanque, an eminent political writer and editor and proprietor of the *Examiner;* Maclise, and James and Horace Smith, authors of *The Rejected Addresses.*

Gradually her drawing-room became the acknowledged centre of all that was brilliant in literature and art; the common ground where the aristocracy of rank met that of talent; where painters were introduced to patrons, and authors met editors and publishers, and critics came face to face with the criticised: the hostess presiding over an assemblage whose prejudices on the one hand and whose sensitiveness on the other, made them difficult to manage; but which she with her strong individuality, felicitous tact, and common sense, succeeded in harmonising.

Perhaps the most remarkable, most interesting of all who crowded her *salon* was young Benjamin Disraeli; a distinguished figure in any assembly, physically and mentally.

In thought he had ever been in advance of his years, as a school-boy had fretted at formulas that had given him words instead of ideas: and at a period when most lads are unformed in mind and plastic, this youth had distinguished himself by his imagination, fluency, his ambitious dreams, his brilliancy. It was out of school indeed he had learned most; the place which pleased and helped him best being his father's library.

In the course of his reading he was left to his fancy, the volumes which had most attraction, dealing with men who had risen by force of their own abilities. Young Ben was acutely conscious of power within himself, but the scene towards which it led was unknown, unsighted; one of those mysteries

which lend a delightful charm to untried youth.

Early in life he was seized by that greed of distinction which was later to elevate him; and he had been bidden by his father to beware of being a great man in a hurry. The elder Disraeli who was something of a poet and a dreamer had early in life, with a choice strange to his race, refused to become interested in business, and employed himself as an author; in which pursuit he immediately gained distinction and attracted round him many scholars and leading literary men of the day. Having inherited a fortune from his father he became independent, and soon after abandoned Judaism because, as he explained, of the narrowness of its system in modern days, and with all his family joined the Church of England.

The elder Disraeli had three other children to educate and provide for, two sons and a daughter. Soon after he left school, Benjamin's career was mapped out for him, a powerful friend of the family having offered to secure him a post in the Court of Chancery, which in due course would lead to a good position and a handsome income. But that he might become qualified for this, it was necessary he should first be admitted as a solicitor. At the age of seventeen he therefore entered a lawyer's office; and though its business was wholly uncongenial to his restless and aspiring spirit, he conscientiously went through the routine of his duties whilst there.

His whole time however was not given to law books. At his father's house he continually met poets and politicians, the great critics, newspaper writers and men of general ability, to whom he condescended to listen, weighing them, measuring them against himself somewhat to their detriment, commenting on them mentally. He then began to write for the press, and presently in his twentieth year produced a remarkable novel, *Vivian Grey*, no less full of affectation than ability, and replete with satire and personality.

The book which was published anonymously, seized upon public attention, its impertinence was laughed at and resented, its wit discussed at dinner-tables, and a key to the personages it satirised published. Lady Blessington, reading it in Paris, declared it was wild but clever, 'full of genius and dazzling by its passionate eloquence.'

The delight which success brought him was checked by a strange and unaccountable illness that befel him. His head became heavy and dull, he was seized with fits of giddiness during which the world swung round him, he became abstracted and once fell into a trance from which he did not recover for a week. Work in a lawyer's office was no longer possible, doctors were consulted and he was advised to travel. With friends of the family he went through Switzerland to the north of Italy as far as Venice and back by France. On his return home he was little better, and all thought of serious work was postponed.

The elder Disraeli by this time had removed from his residence in Russell Square and taken an old picturesque manor house named Bradenham, two miles from High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. Here Benjamin had the benefit of healthful air; he walked for hours upon the downs, or rode across country at his leisure. Yet such advantages together with the care of his mother and sister failed to cure him; his nervous headaches continued, at times the old giddiness seized him, work in a solicitor's office was still avoided. Indeed the condition of his health, his distaste for law, and disinclination for a position which if it afforded him a handsome competence would likewise hamper his individuality, made him decline the post in the Court of Chancery, which was then given to his brother Ralph.

Young Disraeli was now permitted to take his own way, which those about him were wise enough to see must lead to distinction. His stars beckoning him towards the course he was to follow; he became absorbed in politics and desired a place in parliament. At this time however there seemed no prospect of his realising this ambition, he must wait: meanwhile he read and in the intervals of his headaches, he wrote. It was about this time that he addressed Bulwer, who was also to become a warm friend of Lady Blessington's.

Whilst at college Bulwer had entered into correspondence with the elder Disraeli whose works he greatly admired, and had visited

the author at Bradenham, where possibly he had not met Benjamin.

Early in 1829 the latter sent the author of *Pelham* a present of some Turkish tobacco, when Bulwer, writing from Brooke's Club, thanks him with a somewhat lofty air 'for the delicate and flattering attention he had been pleased to pay him,' adding 'things of that sort have a great value to the author; and the value is his power of burning them.' He will be happy in any way to repay this attention, and, as one of the public, hopes that his correspondent's health and leisure will very soon allow him to fulfil the brilliant and almost unrivalled promise his works had already given.

Five months later in a more friendly note, Bulwer declares himself shocked by the melancholy account Disraeli has given of his health: adding that he would be extremely glad to welcome him at his country house in Woodcote; but should he be unable to accept the invitation, Bulwer hopes they may meet in town.

This meeting between two men whose writings had already given to the world promise of brilliant performance, resulted in friendship, and in 1830 Disraeli submitted the manuscript of the first vol. of his novel *The Young Duke* to Bulwer, who wrote a lengthy criticism upon it, not wholly favourable. Beginning by speaking of the uncommon gratification the story had given him, and the statement that pages could be filled with

praises of its wit, the terseness of its style, its philosophy, and the remarkable felicity with which the coldest insipidities of real life are made entertaining and racy, he adds that Disraeli does not seem to do justice to his own powers when he is so indulgent to flippancies.

'The flippancies I allude to' says the critic 'are an ornate and showy effeminacy, which I think you should cut off on the same principle as Lord Ellinborough should cut off his hair. In a mere fashionable novel aiming at no higher merit, and to a mere dandy aiming at nothing more solid, the flippancies and the hair might be left; and left gracefully. But I do not think the one suits a man who is capable of great things, nor the other a man who occupies great places.

'At all events if you do not think twice, and act alike upon this point, I fear you are likely to be attacked and vituperated to a degree which fame can scarcely recompense, and which hereafter may cause you serious inconvenience. The egotisms I do not object to. They are always charming and often exceedingly touching.'

This letter had the effect of making Disraeli displeased, not with its writer but with his own work which he threatened to destroy, a threat which brought from Bulwer an assurance that he considered what he had read 'a very fine and brilliant book,' and all he asked was for the writer to consider whether he would correct it.

When published *The Young Duke*, a clever book giving vivid sketches of society, was eagerly read, praised, abused and talked of, but it scarcely advanced its author's reputation.

As he grew no better of his mysterious malady, he wished once more to travel, and it was but natural to one of his temperament, that his desires should turn towards the East, the land of his ancestors, the home of mysticism and romance. His father however, who considered the necessary outlay, was unwilling to agree with his son's wishes; but they were as he states, soon 'knocked on the head in a calmer manner than I could have expected from my somewhat rapid but indulgent sire.'

All objections to his desires were presently removed when friends and former neighbours of the family, the Austens, with whom he had travelled into Italy, came to his assistance and enabled him to carry out his scheme. Accompanied by a friend he set out on his journey in June 1830 and reached Gibraltar on the first of the following month. His fame as a novelist had preceded him, and when the garrison talked of *Vivian Grey* he at first apologised and spoke of youthful blunders, being really ashamed, 'but finding them to my astonishment sincere, and fearing they were stupid enough to adopt my last opinion, I shifted my position just in time, looked very grand, and passed myself off for a child of the sun, like the Spaniards of Peru.'

Amongst the subalterns he maintained his reputation for being a great judge of costume, to their envy and admiration. 'I have also' he writes 'the fame of being the first who ever passed the Straits with two canes, a morning and an evening one. I change my cane on the gunfire, and hope to carry them both on to Cairo. It is wonderful the effect those magical wands produce. I owe to them even more attention than to being the supposed author of—what is it? I forget.'

From Gibraltar he went to Spain, a land whose light and colour, passion and romance strongly appealed to his nature. To him it was the country for adventure, as he writes. A wonderful ecclesiastical establishment covers the land with a privileged class. You are wakened from your slumbers by the rosario, the singing procession by which the peasantry congregate to their labours. 'It is most effective, full of noble chants and melodious responses, that break upon the still fresh air, and your ever fresher feelings in a manner truly magical. Oh, wonderful Spain. I thought enthusiasm was dead within me and nothing could be new. I have hit, perhaps, upon the only country which could have upset my theory.'

Malta was the next place visited and here he made some sensation. They had long been expecting him, he tells his father. Here affectation told better than wit. The previous day he had been at a racket court sitting in the gallery amongst strangers. The ball

entered and lightly striking him fell at his feet. He picked it up and observing a young rifleman excessively stiff, he humbly requested him to forward its passage into the court, as he had really never thrown a ball in his life.

As to his health he was still infirm but no longer destitute of hope. 'I wander' he says 'in pursuit of health like the immortal exile in pursuit of that lost shore which is now almost glittering in my sight.'

Luck being with him, he met at Gibraltar a wealthy friend named James Clay, who having a yacht, invited Disraeli and his friend to sail with him to Greece. Of course they accepted, and for this voyage the young author arrayed himself in the costume of a Greek pirate, a blood-red shirt with silver buttons as big as shillings, an immense scarf for girdle, full of pistols and daggers, red cap, red slippers, broad blue-striped jacket and trousers.

Arrived at Corfu, they learned the Grand Vizier was at Yanina when Disraeli decided on paying him a visit. Meanwhile he hired a servant, a Greek of Cyprus who wore a Mameluke dress of crimson and gold, with a white turban thirty yards long, and a sabre glittering like a rainbow. At Arta where he rested on his way he for the first time reposed upon a divan and for the first time heard a muezzin from a minaret. Then he waited on the Turkish Governor. 'I cannot describe' he writes 'the awe with which I first entered

the divan of a great Turk, and the curious feeling with which I found myself squatting on the right hand of a bey, smoking an amber-mouthed chibouque, drinking coffee and paying him compliments through an interpreter.'

The life of the Turkish people greatly accords with his taste, which was naturally somewhat indolent and melancholy. 'And I do not think it would disgust you' he writes to Bulwer 'to repose on voluptuous ottomans and smoke superb pipes, daily to indulge in the luxuries of a bath which requires half-a-dozen attendants for its perfection; to court the air in a carved caïque, by shores which are a perpetual scene; and to find no exertion greater than a canter on a barb; this is I think a far more sensible life than all the bustles of clubs, all the boring of drawing-rooms, and all the coarse vulgarity of our political controversies.'

A life such as this was destined to remain a dream to him; the more active side of his character led him through the bustle, the borings, and the vulgarities of which he speaks.

Cyprus, Jaffa, and Jerusalem were next visited, the most delightful week of all his travels being spent in the Holy City where every night he dined on the roof of a house by moonlight, the wonderful land around full of the mysteries of shadows. Thence he went to Egypt where he ascended the Nile to Thebes. 'My eyes and my mind' he writes 'yet ache with a grandeur so little in unison

with our littleness. The landscape was quite characteristic: mountains of burning sand. Vegetation unnaturally vivid, groves of cocoa trees, groups of crocodiles, and an ebon population in a state of nudity armed with spears of reeds.'

In the summer of 1831 he was back in England, the great enemy, as he called his illness, was overcome: he was in a famous condition, full of life and hope. He was also great with literary projects, and at once set himself to write a new novel *Contarini Fleming; a Psychological Romance*, which was published in May 1832. This novel containing wonderful pictures of Oriental life was pronounced by Dean Milman a work in no way inferior to *Childe Harold* and equally calculated to arrest public attention.

This later opinion was soon justified. The romance met with abundance of praise and blame. 'One thing which we all expected' says the author 'is very evident, that not one of the writers has the slightest idea of the nature or purpose of the work. Amongst others Tom Campbell, who as he says never reads any books not his own, is delighted with it: "I shall review it myself" he exclaims "and it will be a psychological review."'

Early in 1832 he had taken rooms in Duke Street, a town residence being quite necessary. As may readily be imagined a man of his brilliancy and promise was eagerly sought and he soon became acquainted with a wide circle. He was now on the threshold of that career

to which he had long and anxiously looked forward. The great part he was to play before the world was yet invisible, wrapt in the future; but that prescience of events, which comes to finer minds, bracing them with hope and courage; that glow which precedes the dawn, assured him of that which was to come; that towards which he hastened with impatience.

Knowing that to impress by ability was more difficult than to attract by notoriety, he condescended to gain attention by singularity, fully conscious that he could when necessary prove his genius. The *rôle* he assumed was in no way displeasing or humiliating, on the contrary it could not have been but amusing to one gifted with such sense of humour. His society manners were full of dainty affectation: he was flippant, impertinent, satirical, according to the company in which he found himself, but amazingly clever in all; whilst he dressed with a lavish foppishness that seemed to merit Carlyle's description of him as 'a fantastic ape.'

An account of his appearance before a startled dinner-party, is given by Lady Dufferin. On this occasion he wore a black velvet coat lined with satin, purple trousers with a gold band running down the outside seam, a scarlet waistcoat, long lace ruffles, falling down to the tips of his fingers, white gloves with several brilliant rings outside them and long black ringlets rippling upon his shoulders.

It was only a man of genius who could not merely unabashed, but calm in the consciousness of superiority, present such a figure in a British household and amongst the most conservative of aristocracies. But he was favoured by having Hebrew blood in his veins; he had come of the most wonderful race which the world with its teeming millions has produced; unconquerable, unique alike in its sublimity and its strength; unsurpassed in its ability; a race that has mercifully leavened all western nations and given them the greatest they possess in art.

A curious figure that derided sobriety, he looked half contemptuously, half amusedly, and with some curiosity at the life around him. Fluent, his words seemed to conceal his thoughts: vivacious, it appeared impossible to penetrate him. The unknown is ever preferable to the obvious. From the first he was a success.

At a re-union at Bulwer's he met Lords Strangford and Mulgrave, Count D'Orsay 'the famous Parisian dandy' and a large sprinkling of Blues, amongst them Lady Morgan, Mrs Norton, and L. E. L.

'Bulwer came up to me and said "There is one Blue who insists upon an introduction.' "Oh my dear fellow I cannot really, the power of repartee has deserted me." "I have pledged myself, you must come;" so he led me up to a very sumptuous personage, looking like a full blown rose, Mrs Gore.' Though he conversed with the novelist, he avoided the poetess, L. E. L., 'who looked the very per-

sonification of Brompton—pink satin dress and white satin shoes, red cheeks, snub nose, and hair *à la Sappho.*'

His intimacy with the Bulwers was now thoroughly established. He dined there in March 1832. His host 'whatever may be his situation is more sumptuous and fantastic than ever;' his hostess was a blaze of jewels and looked like Juno 'only instead of a peacock, she had a dog in her lap, called Fairy, and not bigger than a bird of paradise and quite as brilliant. We drank champagne out of a saucer of ground glass, mounted on a pedestal of cut glass' he records, open champagne glasses being evidently a novelty at that date.

A more memorable entertainment took place under the same roof the following month. L. E. L. was again there, but quite changed. 'She had thrown off Greco-Bromptonian costume, and was perfectly *à la Française* and really looked pretty. At the end of the evening I addressed a few words to her, of the value of which she seemed sensible.' Then a lady of more than certain age, very fantastically dressed, came up to him and asked his opinion about a Leonardo da Vinci. 'She paid me the most ridiculous compliments. This was Lady Stepney.'

He had a long conversation with Lord Mulgrave, and a man who turned out to be Lord William Lennox, and in the course of the evening he stumbled over Tom Moore to whom he introduced himself. 'It is evident

that he has read or heard of the Young Duke as his courtesy was marked. "How is your head?" he inquired. "I have heard of you, as everybody has. Did we not meet at Murray's once?"'

The evening was however most remarkable as being that on which he first met the woman who subsequently became his wife, freed him from debt, and rendered him independent. 'I was introduced "by particular desire" to Mrs Wyndham Lewis' he writes 'a pretty little woman, a flirt, and a rattle; indeed gifted with a volubility I should think unequalled, and of which I can convey no idea. She told me that she "liked silent, melancholy men." I answered "that I had no doubt of it."'

Next we find him dining with Lord Eliot, afterwards Earl of St Germains, where the author sat next to Sir Robert Peel. 'He is a very great man indeed' comments Disraeli 'and they all seem afraid of him. By-the-bye I observed that he attacked his turbot almost entirely with his knife. I can easily conceive that he could be very disagreeable, but yesterday he was in a most condescending mood and unbent with becoming haughtiness. I reminded him by my dignified familiarity both that he was an ex-minister and I a present Radical.'

He was still determined to enter parliament and in this year, 1832, twice contested High Wycombe in high Radical interests, taking with him strong recommendatory letters from

O'Connell, Hume, and Burdett, but in both instances was defeated. The failure of constituents to appreciate him did not destroy his hopes or his confidence in himself. In February he went as a visitor to the House of Commons to hear Bulwer adjourn the House and to listen to a fine debate. Here he heard Macaulay's best speech, Sheil and Charles Grant: the first he thought admirable 'but between ourselves' he wrote 'I could floor them all. I was never more confident of anything than that I could carry everything before me in that House. The time will come.'

A month later and *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* was published. From the first it was successful, and added fresh fame to its author. The greatest houses were opened to him and he was seen at all fashionable assemblies. Count D'Orsay having introduced him to Lady Blessington, he at once became her friend. He was asked by her to dinner when he met amongst others Lord Durham the Prince of Moskova, Lords Elphinston and Castlereagh. Then he went to Lady Cork's where was the Duke of Wellington in high spirits: later to a water-party with D'Orsay to Blackwall. Lady Cork invited him to a *rout;* he met Lord Lyndhurst; he dined with O'Connell; he was introduced to Malebran; he made his *début* at Almacks; he visited the Duchess of St Albans. 'I have had a great success in society this year' he tells his sister. 'I am as popular with the dandies as I was

hated by the second-rate men. I make my way easily in the highest set, where there is no envy, malice, etc., and where they like to admire and be amused.'

Notwithstanding the time he spent in society he still found leisure to write; and in 1833 he had penned four thousand lines of a Revolutionary epic, which could not be completed under thirty thousand lines. The idea of this poem first came to him on the windy plain of Troy; he thought the conception sublime, but on consideration admitted that all depended on the execution. To his friend Mrs Austin, whom he had consulted during the progress of *Vivian Grey*, he now communicated news of this poem, when ever anxious to aid him she arranged that he should dine with her and afterwards try the effect of his Revolutionary epic on her guests. To this he willingly consented and the dinner took place in the middle of January 1834.

When the time came for him to read his cantos, he stood upon the hearth facing those selected to have the privilege of hearing them. It was necessary he thought, first to explain, that all great works that had formed an epoch in the history of human intellect had been an embodification of the spirit of the age. An heroic age produced in the *Iliad* an heroic poem; the foundation of the empire of the Cæsars produced in the *Æneid* a political poem; the Reformation and its consequences produced in the *Paradise Lost* a religious poem. Since the revolt of

America a new principle had been at work in the world, to which he would trace all that occurs.

'This is the Revolutionary principle' he said 'and this is what I wish to embody in the Revolutionary Epic, and I imagine the genius of Feudalism, and the genius of Federation appearing before the Almighty throne and pleading their respective and antagonistic causes.'

A writer who was present had better be allowed to describe the scene.

'Standing with his back to the fire, he proceeded in his usual grandiloquent style and with his usual solemn gesture to ask why, as the heroic age had produced its Homer, the Augustan era its Virgil, the Renaissance its Dante, the Reformation its Milton, should not the Revolutionary epoch in which we live, produce its representative poet? The scene was one not to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. There was something irresistibly comic in the young man dressed in the fantastic, coxcombical costume that he then effected—velvet coat of an original cut thrown wide open, and ruffles to its sleeves, shirt collars turned down in Byronic fashion, an elaborately embroidered waistcoat whence issued voluminous folds of frill, and shoes adorned with red rosettes — his black hair pomatumed and elaborately curled, and his person redolent with perfume — announcing himself as the Homer or Dante of the age.'

How it was received we are not told: but

whatever favourable impression it may have made, was instantly destroyed: for no sooner had Disraeli hastened away to some great reception, than a mimic, assuming the voice and attitude of the poet, declaimed an impromptu burlesque of the opening lines which caused infinite merriment to all present. What can withstand ridicule? As for the poem, it fell flat upon publication, and was soon forgotten. Henceforth his poetical compositions were reserved for Lady Blessington's *Book of Beauty*.

His constant appearance in society gave him ample opportunity of falling in love, of which he persistently refused to avail himself. With all the romance and poetry of his character, he seemed somewhat cynical regarding this emotion. Once he asks his sister how she would like Lady Z—— for a sister-in-law. 'Very clever and twenty-five thousand pounds. As for love, all my friends who married for love and beauty either beat their wives or live apart from them. This is literally the case. I may commit many follies in life, but I never intend to marry for love, which I am sure is a guarantee of infelicity.'

But though he could keep out of love he could not keep free from debt. His election expenses, his manner of living, and bills which he had backed for friends who were unable to meet them, weighed him heavily. He considered that a poet suddenly disturbed in the midst of the rapture of creation by a dunning letter, was an object of pity; he complained of the

cruelty of having his powers marred at a moment when he believed they might produce something great and lasting; and at times he dreaded to leave the house on account of the Philistines who were lying in wait for him.

CHAPTER III

Edward Lytton Bulwer—Gambling in Paris—Love and Marriage—First Novels—Lady Blessington reads *Pelham*—Interview with an Eccentric Architect—Bulwer's Letters to His Mother—Hard Work and Bitter Criticism—Sets out for Italy with Introductions from Lady Blessington—His Opinion of Landor—Writes from Naples—Letters from Landor, and Lady Blessington.

A FRIEND of Lady Blessington's scarcely less interesting or distinguished than Disraeli was Edward Lytton Bulwer, who in 1831, when in his twenty-eighth year, became editor of the *New Monthly Magazine.* Descended from a family which according to its own belief had been settled in Norfolk since the Conquest, this member was in bearing a dainty patrician, eccentric in his ideas and talented. In appearance he was of ordinary size, his hair light, his eyes pale blue, his nose prominent and his mouth full-lipped.

Being delicate in his youth he had been educated by his mother until such time as he questioned her whether she was 'not sometimes overcome by the sense of her own identity;'

when she considered it was time he should be sent to school. His ability was evident from the beginning, and amongst those who looked forward to his future with enthusiasm was Dr Parr, an intimate of his grandfather, his mother's guardian, and Lady Blessington's friend. This enthusiasm was not without foundation; for at the age of seventeen he published a volume of poems 'Ismael'; and five years later whilst at Cambridge he won the Chancellor's medal by a poem on sculpture.

In 1826 at the age of twenty-three, he had taken his degree as B.A. and was then launched in London Society where he was known as 'a finished dandy' and styled by his acquaintances 'Childe Harold.' It was in this year that whilst in Paris he visited a gambling-house where he spent the night, and his luck being extraordinary, left next morning with a large sum in his pocket. Daylight was creeping into his rooms as he entered them; and as he went to secure his gains in his writing-desk standing upon a consol table in front of a mirror, he caught sight of his face which was not only pale and haggard but sinister, distorted by the fever of greed and nervous excitement. The shock this sight caused made him resolve never again to gamble.

The winnings however were invested and augmented the annuity of two hundred a year he inherited from his father, and the allowance made him by his mother whose estate was at her own disposal.

Before he had reached his twenty-fifth year

he had married Rosina Doyle Wheeler, an Irish beauty, clever and witty, with a will and a temper of her own. But a year before he had declared that love was dead in him for ever, that the freshness of his youth lay buried in the grave; but these were probably the avowals which the romance of his temperament inclined him to believe, but which his subsequent actions led him to belie: for his love for the woman he afterwards made his wife was sufficiently strong to withstand the opposition of his mother to whom he was devotedly attached.

Arguing with her that marriage was 'of all the cases the one in which a difference with parents is most universally allowed,' he goes on to say that matrimonial philandering has always appeared to him a contemptible frivolity: that he was not blind to Rosina's faults; that she was not to blame if she could not live with her mother; and that he knew her bringing up had been an unhappy one 'but it has not deprived her of a mind and heart, for which I love her far too well to flirt with her.'

This, the first and only difference of his life with his mother, and perhaps some knowledge of the unsuitability of the wife he was about to take, fretted his life at the moment when it should have been brightest.

'Prepare *ma belle amie*, prepare' he writes to his friend Mrs Cunningham, three months before his marriage 'I am going to be married. And that very soon. My intended is very

beautiful, very clever, very good; but alas the human heart is inscrutable. I love and am loved. My heart is satisfied, my judgment too. If the life before me is not free from difficulty, anxiety, labour, yet in the contemplation of these my courage feels only a consciousness, which should be joyous, of power to overcome them all. And still I am wretched. My plan is, after marriage, to hire a large old-fashioned house I have found in the country, neither near London nor yet very far from it; to live there in great retirement for three years, and give myself wholly up to literature. In which I hope to earn some of that "breath of fools" which the knaves have wisely called Reputation.'

The old-fashioned country house to which he referred, was Woodcote, near Pangbourne, to where on the 29th of August 1827 he brought his wife. Here he began to work systematically as an author; sitting down to his desk after breakfast and writing for about three hours daily; composition being with him at first a slow and laborious task which practice rendered easy and rapid. It was not however, merely whilst he had a pen in his hand that he was working: for during the long walks and rides he took, his mind was busy in creating the personages and framing the incidents he afterwards embodied in his pages. Thought, as he said, was continually flowing through his mind: he scarcely knew a moment in which he was awake and not thinking. 'Nor by thought do I mean mere

reverie or castle-building; but a sustained process of thinking. I have always in my mind some distinct train of ideas which I seek to develop, or some positive truth which I am trying to arrive at. If I lived for a million years, I could not exhaust a millionth part of my thoughts. I know that I must be immortal if only because I think.'

In the year in which he married, *Falkland* was published, a noyel he afterwards withdrew as being unworthy of his reputation. At the time it received little notice from the press, but Colburn the publisher thought it held sufficient promise to warrant him in offering five hundred pounds to the author for a novel in three volumes, providing that work pleased him.

'I will give you one that shall be sure to succeed' answered Bulwer, who had in his mind a certain story he had begun a year before, which he finished a year later, that was ultimately called *Pelham.* When the last lines were written the manuscript was sent to the publisher, who handed it to his chief reader Schubert, by whom it was emphatically condemned as worthless. It was then given to a second reader Ollier, himself an author whose favourable criticism induced Colburn to read and decide between two conflicting opinions. Three or four days later he called both readers into his room and said 'I have read Mr Bulwer's novel, and it's my decided opinion that it will be the book of the year.'

He then sent a clerk with a cheque for the

stipulated sum; and to him Bulwer stated that had the novel been declined, he would never have written another, but have devoted himself entirely to politics. *Pelham* was published anonymously in June 1828, at a time when its writer was unacquainted with a single critic and scarcely knew an author. For at least a couple of months after its production 'it was in a fair way of perishing prematurely in its cradle' as Bulwer wrote: for with the exception of three encouraging criticisms, it was received with indifference or abuse by the reviewers. By degrees however it won its way to popularity and presently created a sensation, not only in London but in Paris where it became a text-book about English society in the *cafés*, clubs, and *salons*.

It was whilst living in the French capital that Lady Blessington read the novel with intense interest, and recorded her opinion of its striking cleverness. The novel with its epigrammatic style, its foppish hero, its knowledge of society, its satire, philosophy, and flippancy was new to the town and as such was resented by the critics and welcomed by the readers. At dinner-tables and in drawing-rooms it was the chief topic of conversation: speculations and bets were made regarding its author, whose name soon became known. Then followed shoals of letters; congratulations from friends, offers from publishers, comments from the unknown; and at least one substantial proof of admiration from a fair admirer, the anonymous gift of 'an enormous

gold dressing-case elaborately fitted up with every conceivable requirement for the toilette of an exquisite.'

One of the most remarkable effects the book produced, perhaps one to be regretted, was to banish the fashion of wearing coloured coats for evening dress, which was then the custom, *Pelham* having introduced black. A second notable effect was the effacement of the Byronic air of foppery, which then obtained; young men of taste and fashion being at this time in the habit of posing as gloomy heroes with haunting memories, the perpetrators of dark crimes, the victims of unquenchable sorrows. The new form of foppery which such youths followed had for its aim affectation, assurance, dandyism, the qualities which made *Pelham* a favourite with the opposite sex.

Meanwhile Bulwer went steadily on at his literary work, writing for magazines and reviews, besides penning another novel *The Disowned* which appeared in December 1828; which though he considered it far inferior to *Pelham* met with a much more favourable reception from the critics. For this book he received eight hundred pounds.

The requirements of his work necessitating continual visits to London, he resolved to leave Woodcote and settle in town. In the autumn of 1829 he moved from his country residence, and took Vine Cottage, Fulham, for a short time whilst looking out for a suitable home in London. This he seemed to find in a house in Hertford Street, regarding which he

could not come to terms with the landlord, Mr Nash, a fashionable architect and an eccentric man.

As he seemed obstinate and unreasonable to Bulwer, his wife resolved to accompany him when next he visited Nash to see if their united efforts could better succeed with him. 'We found that worthy' she says in a lively letter to a friend 'seated in his own splendid library, or rather gallery; which is half a mile long and done in mosaic to imitate the Vatican. He was more obstinate than ever, declaring with an oath that he would not abate a farthing, and then he changed the subject.

'At last he said "Pray sir are you any relation to that wonderful young man who has written the delightful novel of *Pelham?*"

'"Allow me" said I "Mr Nash, to introduce you to that wonderful young man."

'Upon which Nash jumped up, made Edward a low bow, and said "Well then sir, for *Pelham's* sake you must have the house on your own terms, and I'll make it one of the handsomest houses in town for you, with the best library. And if you ever again write anything half as good as *Pelham*, by God I shall be glad to think I planned the room you wrote it in."

'After this fine speech he offered Edward casts from all his statues, showed us all over his house or rather palace, and finished off by throwing open the doors of another suite of rooms where ensconced in her domestic bower sat Mrs Nash.

'"My dear" he exclaimed "I have brought the author of *Pelham* and his wife *for you to look at.*"

'Thereupon we put out our paws, wagged our tongues (in default of tails) and walked up and down in the most docile manner, to be stared at as the first Pelham and Pelhamess ever caught alive in this country.

'At this juncture of affairs old Nash began to fumble in his pockets (which he has a great trick of doing). "Oh never mind paying now" said I "I'll take the bronze chimney-piece to my boudoir instead." "Very well" he replied laughingly. "So you shall and anything else you like."

'And so I hope at least that Edward will take the house and that this matter is settled.'

All this while his mother who had objected to his marriage, had refused to become reconciled to his wife. The elder lady was perhaps sore that her prediction had not come true, which was that if he married Rosina Wheeler he would be 'at a year's end the most miserable of men.' Stern, with an exaggerated sense of what was due to herself, she had not only continued to ignore her daughter-in-law, but for a time had declined to answer her son's letters; had sent him messages of the most uncompromising nature, and couched in the most contemptuous terms; had returned every memorial of him 'as if' he tells her 'to exclude from your house every relic, and from your thoughts every remembrance of me.'

In vain he wrote her affectionate, appeal-

ing, and respectful letters, sent her copies of the books which made him famous, and informed her of the birth of his child; the result was the same. So long as he and his wife remained in the country her resentment was not so public and mortifying; but having taken up their residence in town where she lived for part of the year, her estrangement became more insulting to his wife.

'The affront I complain of is this' he writes from Hertford Street. 'I live in the same town with you. You refuse to visit my wife or enter my house. My brother also displeased you by his marriage; but you enter his house and visit his wife. You say you distinguish between the two cases. But the world cannot take the trouble to understand such a distinction. It merely sees that the two brothers being both of age, and having both married gentlewomen, you are sufficiently reconciled to our marriages to see both William and myself, but that your visiting the wife of one and not the wife of the other, is a marked insult to the wife unvisited.'

This argument and others which were used at the same time, had their effect in inducing his mother to visit his wife. From the date of his wedding he had resigned the large allowance his mother had made him, saying 'As I bake so will I brew.' In order to support the position in which he thought it necessary to live, and which was maintained at a cost of about three thousand a year, he had laboured until the strain of the most try-

ing of all occupations began to undermine his health. On her reconciliation to him, his allowance was restored by his mother and accepted by him with the warmest gratitude.

The day came when the novelist's mother visited his wife. The meeting was unsatisfactory; for the younger woman being nervous, feared to show cordiality and perhaps failed to conceal her resentment; whilst the elder woman considered she did not meet with the submission she expected. The result being that when Bulwer 'ready to drop with sickness and exhaustion' called on his mother she complained of his wife's reception of her, and in answer to his remonstrance, reminded him that she maintained his wife.

This thrust not only caused him to renounce the allowance but on his return home to pay over the money she already had transferred to his account. In acquainting her with this fact in a long letter he says he did not consider her allowance in the light of maintenance, for that he required from no human being. 'My own exertions had, and my own exertions yet could maintain me and mine in all we required. I took it in this light (and in this light I thought it was given) that whereas I could alone and always, but only by labour, confinement, and great mental anxiety make more than a thousand a year, it was your wish in offering me this sum, not to maintain me, for I was then (and for nearly three years I had been) maintaining myself, but to save me from

that labour, confinement, and mental anxiety by which alone I could continue to do so.'

He therefore went to work again and on the 7th of July 1829, when he was just six-and-twenty he published *Devereux*, which brought him the sum of fifteen hundred pounds. Before twelve months elapsed he had produced another novel *Paul Clifford*, a work whose avowed purpose it was 'to draw attention to two errors in our penal institutions, viz., a vicious prison discipline and a sanguinary penal code.' This was in 1830, and the following year he became Member of Parliament for Ives and editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*.

By this time his mother had again become reconciled to him and his wife and had once more offered him an allowance which he steadily declined. The strain upon him was now greater than ever, added to which he had to endure constant and bitter anonymous attacks in journals and papers, the general tone of which may be gauged from a few sentences of a letter addressed to him in *Fraser's Magazine* for December 1831; a periodical which had already grossly abused him. 'Nobody' says the writer 'knows better than yourself that to make a fashionable novel all that is required is a tolerable acquaintance with footman and butlers. This will supply the high life. The meanness of the characters introduced you may draw from yourself. . . My dear Bulwer this writing of yours is bitter bad, it is jejune

base twaddle; twaddle I say, Bulwer, twaddle. Your paltry grovelling productions have not the power of influencing the opinion of a lady's lap-dog. . . I think you a deserving young person, whom Nature intended for a footman, and I pity you accordingly for having missed your vocation.'

Little wonder that he appeared to a visitor who stayed in his house 'like a man who has been flayed and is sore all over.' His health threatened to give way, and in the year above named his wife writing to his mother says she fears there is no chance of him getting better, 'for he undertakes a degree of labour that positively, without exaggeration, no three persons could have the health and time to achieve. So incessantly is he occupied that I seldom or never see him till about two or three in the morning, for five minutes. And it is of no use for me to tell him that he will only defeat all the objects of his life by attempting more than he can compass. Poor fellow, my remonstrances only irritate him.'

Lady Blessington made the acquaintance of Bulwer in 1832, whilst he was editor of the magazine in which her 'Conversations' were running. Under his management this publication which was issued at three and sixpence a number and was largely supported by clergymen and county families, became radical in its politics, the result being that its circulation fell from five to four thousand. As a consequence the publisher no longer desired to retain Bulwer as editor when the twelve

months terminated for which he had been engaged.

Nor was Bulwer on his part sorry to resign the cares of editorship. His health being now overtaxed by work he was ordered to travel, when he resolved to visit Italy, taking with him his wife who was beginning to suffer from his captious temper produced by exhausted nerves, and to resent the neglect caused by absorption in his work.

Lady Blessington willingly gave him advice regarding the country he was about to visit, and likewise furnished him with letters of introduction to various distinguished friends of hers living in Italy. One of these was to Landor, which the author of *Pelham* in due time presented to be received with extreme kindness. In writing to Lady Blessington of Landor, Bulwer said 'One is at home instantly with men of genius, their oddities, their humours don't put one out half so much as the formal regularity of your half-clever prigs.

'But Landor thanks to your introduction, had no humours no oddities for me. He invited me to his villa, which is charmingly situated, and smoothed himself down so much, that I thought him one of the best bred men I ever met, as well as one of the most really able: pity nevertheless so far as his talent is concerned, that he pets paradoxes so much; he keeps them as other people keep dogs, coaxes them, plays with them, and now and then sets them to bite a disagreeable intruder.'

Another letter of introduction which Lady

Blessington gave to Bulwer, was addressed to her old friend Sir William Gell then at Naples, who at once asked Mr and Mrs Bulwer to breakfast. The invitation was gladly accepted and they arrived at his villa before he was quite ready to receive them; but from his own room he heard them exclaim 'Oh you dear creature,' words which were not addressed to him, but to one of his dogs who had gone to see who had arrived. Presently Sir William was wheeled into the room and breakfast was announced.

'We got on very well' he told Lady Blessington 'and they ate maccaroni with great success, and positively bought a dog of the same species as mine before they went home, of a black colour, which they christened Lucio, and carried off to their lodgings. I have had a note from each of them since, and on Sunday I am to meet them at dinner at Mr Cravens', for whom I believe you gave them also a letter. I have also told Lady Drummond to invite them to dinner, which she has promised to do; and so thus far I hope they will feel satisfied with my little attentions, bestowed according to your orders.'

Bulwer on his part wrote to Lady Blessington that he found her friend surrounded by his dogs 'amidst which he wheels himself about (for he is entirely unable to stand) in his large chair, and seems to enjoy life, enough to make a man in the possession of his limbs hang himself with envy.' Bulwer never knew

so petted and so popular a man: everyone seemed to love him 'yet there is something artificial and cold about him.'

Though Bulwer had left England in August, he did not reach Naples until November; he having travelled with leisurely ease through a country which did not fail to give him the rest he needed and later to afford the inspiration which in his exhausted condition he had not hoped to find again: for at Rome he conceived the idea of writing his novel *Rienzi*, whilst Naples and its adjoining buried city suggested to him his magnificent romance *The Last Days of Pompeii.*

Writing to Lady Blessington on the 26th of November he says:—

'Behold me then at Naples, beautiful, enchanting, delicious Naples, the only city in all Italy (except old Verona, whose gable ends and motley architecture, and hanging balconies, still speak of Shakespeare and of Romeo) which is quite to my heart. I freeze in the desolate dulness of Rome, with its prosing antiquaries and insolent slaves. In Venice I fancy myself on board a ship, viz. "in a prison with the chance of being drowned." In Florence I recognise a bad Cheltenham. In Naples I for the first time find my dreams of Italy.

'Your magic extends even here, and the place to which you have given me letters of introduction seems to catch a charm from your beauty, and an endearment from your kindness. What a climate and what a sea:

the humour and gaiety of the people delight me. I should be in paradise if it were not for the mosquitoes. But these in truth are terrible tormentors; they even seem to accustom themselves to me, and behave with the polite indifference of satiety; they devour me piecemeal: they are worse than a bad conscience, and never let me sleep at nights. I am told for my comfort, that when the cold weather comes they will vanish, and leave me alternating between the desire to enjoy the day, and the hope to rest at night.'

In another letter he tells her he hears no news and reads no papers. Dumb were to him the new oracles of his old magazine. Politics reach him not, and he missed the roar of London. 'I feel how much' he says 'while I have joked at the English I love England, what a country, what force, what energy, what civilisation? How it shames the talkative slaves here.'

Walter Savage Landor was also writing to her from the same country. She had already told him of her appointment as editor of the *Book of Beauty*, certain that he would rejoice in aught that affected her for good; and later she asked him for a contribution to that annual, whereon he writes:—

'Your letter like a talisman brought me into your presence. I will not swear that I cried aloud, "You shall be obeyed" but that you are, the sonnet within will vouch for me,' and then he proceeds to tell her of his own work. 'I happened to have these two Conversations in

the number of those which I once intended to publish. People have got lately so many better things, that I have been obliged to add another 700 to a debt of 24,000, in order that my publisher might not be a loser by me. He had made an improvident bargain, to share in the profits or loss. Now, a little improvidence added to mine is no more important than a little debt added to it; but with him it must be otherwise. Enough of this.'

This letter which is dated March 1833 reached Lady Blessington at a time when she was particularly busy; for writing to a correspondent she mentions that she has six hundred pages to write and compose between the fourth and the last day of the month, for a work which unless completed by that period, she forfeits an engagement: the work being the *Repealers* which as already mentioned was published in June.

In the following month the Countess Guiccioli had been summoned to Ravenna, where her youngest sister, a girl of thirteen was dying of consumption. A few days after the arrival of the Contessa, freedom came to the child who was '*une jeune fille charmante, remplie de talens, donée d'une beauté non commune et je l'aimais tendrement. Vous pouvez donc vous imaginer, ma chère* Lady Blessington,' writes the Contessa '*comme sa perte a du m'affliger.*'

Lady Blessington's reply to this communication, will, more than any words a biographer could use, show the sympathy she possessed.

'My dear Madame Guiccioli' it begins 'I have learned with deep regret the affliction that has fallen on your domestic circle, an affliction which few are so calculated to feel in all its bitterness as yourself. While I was accusing you of forgetting your friends in England, which would be indeed ungrateful, as they do not cease to remember you with affection, you were in grief, and absorbed too much by the recollection of what you had lost to be blamed for forgetting the friends who still remain. Alas, *chère amie*, it is not until we have lost those we loved, that we feel all their value. Memory feeds on grief, and calls up looks and voices that we can see or hear no more on earth, but that brought back by memory, have power to make us forget for a few moments the painful present, in the happier past.

'I do not seek to offer you vain consolation, because I too well know its inefficiency, and you have been too highly tried in affliction, not to have learned its bitter lesson — submission.

'I hope we shall see you in England next year; you have left behind you too agreeable an impression, for those who have had the pleasure of knowing you, not to desire to see you here again; and among your friends no one more anxiously desires it than myself. London has been very full, but not very gay this season. Our opera has been brilliant, and offered a galaxy of talent, such as we never had before. Pasta, Malibran, Tamburini, Rubini, Donzelli and a host of minor stars,

with a *corps de ballet* with Taglioni at their head, who more than redeemed their want of excellency. I did not miss a single night, and was amply repaid by the pleasure I received.

'You are so kind as to wish me to tell you of myself and therefore I must play the egotist. My health has been good and I have written a political novel which appeared in June, with the reception of which I have every reason to be satisfied, and for which I got a good sum.

'I am now coming forth with a very beautiful work called *The Book of Beauty;* I say beautiful, as it is to be embellished with fine engravings from beautiful female portraits, illustrated by tales in prose and verse, to which many of my literary friends have kindly contributed. You see my dear Countess that I have not been idle since I saw you; but the truth is I like occupation, and find it the best cure for banishing painful retrospections.

'Mr Bulwer set off yesterday for Italy and will visit Rome and Naples. I saw Mr Moore three days ago and he inquired very kindly for you, and I saw Campbell lately who does not forget you. I wish you would send me a little Italian tale in prose or verse for my book. I know you could if you would, but I fear you are too idle. I trust you go on with the *Memoirs* you promised to write. It would amuse and instruct you, and would be highly gratifying to the world. Pray write to me often and your letters shall be punctually answered.'

Before this year ended Landor wrote Lady Blessington a letter burning with indignation. He had evidently heard or read a false rumour of the demise of Gillman in whose house Samuel Taylor Coleridge lived from 1816 till his death, which occurred before that of his benefactor. Therefore Landor writes :—

'I find that Coleridge has lost the beneficent friend, at whose house he lived. George the Fourth, the vilest wretch in Europe, gave him one hundred pounds a year, enough, in London, to buy three turnips and half an egg a day. Those men surely were the most dexterous of courtiers, who resolved to show William that his brother was *not* the vilest, by dashing the half egg and three turnips from the plate of Coleridge. No such action as this is recorded of any administration in the British annals, and I am convinced that there is not a state in Europe, or Asia, in which the paltriest minister or the puniest despot would recommend it. I am sorry that Lord Althorpe who speaks like a gentleman, should be implicated in a charge so serious, though he and his colleagues are likely to undergo the popular vengeance for less grave offences.'

The fact that so justly roused Landor's wrath on this occasion was that 'the permanent honorarium' of a hundred guineas each per annum which George the Fourth assured to ten royal associates of the Society of Literature, was abruptly discontinued on his death. For William the Fourth declared he 'was too poor and had too many nearer claims upon the

privy purse' to keep the promise his brother had made.

It was in the month of August in this year 1833 that a great loss befel Lady Blessington when her house was entered by burglars, who though unable to take her plate pillaged her drawing-room of its valuable ornaments such as antique silver snuff-boxes, seals, gold-topped smelling-bottles, and *bric-à-brac* which for their associations were beyond price, but whose intrinsic value was estimated at a thousand pounds. Every effort to recover her property was vain, no trace of the robbers could be discovered. But many years later Lady Blessington received a letter from a convict undergoing penal servitude for life, giving her an account of the robbery and stating for her satisfaction that when the objects stolen were broken up and sold for their gold, silver, or jewels, they fetched seven hundred pounds.

CHAPTER IV

Publication of the *Conversations with Lord Byron* —*The Book of Beauty*—The Pains and Pleasures of Editorship — Letters from Bulwer, Disraeli, John Kenyon, Monckton Milnes, Charles Mathews—Landor and His Works—N. P. Willis comes to Town—His Impression of Lady Blessington and Her Friends — Bulwer's Talk— Disraeli's Correspondence — Henry Bulwer— Letter from Lady Blessington.

THE *Conversations with Lord Byron* were published in volume form in the spring of 1834, and created a great deal of attention. A double interest was centred in the book because of its writer and its subject. It was generally considered valuable for the insight it afforded into an individuality so complex as that of the poet: but there were some critics who without evidence stated that Byron had not extended to her the friendship she described, and that she had merely drawn on her imagination for the material she supplied. Such assertions, made to disparage the writer and injure her book, failed to have the vicious effect desired; for the *Conversations* were widely read, much praised, and added to her literary reputation.

The *Book of Beauty* for 1834, which was the first to appear under her editorship, likewise proved a success. Its value was enhanced to many because of the portrait of herself drawn by Parris, which it contained. Another of its engravings was called Francesca. Writing to her in February of this year to acknowledge the receipt of a copy which she sent him, Landor states that 'by a strange fatality' it reached him on his birthday. 'Mr Seymour' he says 'is both a polite and a friendly man, yet I cannot imagine that he detained it a single day in his office, for the sake of animating me upon the day when I am always more melancholy than upon any other—serious I should say, not melancholy.

'The book is indeed the *Book of Beauty* both inside and outside. Nevertheless, I must observe that neither here nor in any other engraving do I find a resemblance of you. I do not find the expression. Lawrence has not succeeded either, unless you have the gift of changing it almost totally. The last change in that case was for the better—but pray stay there.

'I have a little spite against the frontispiece, and am resolved to prefer Francesca. If I had seen such a person any time towards the close of the last century, I am afraid I should have been what some rogue called me upon a very different occasion, much later, *matto! ma matto!* Age breaks down the prison in which beauty has enthralled us: but I suspect there are some of us, like the old fellow let

loose from the Bastille, who would gladly get in again, were it possible.'

The annual was printed, though not issued in London, in the middle of the year, for the purpose of exportation to America, India, and the Colonies, where it reached by December and enjoyed a wide circulation. It therefore had to be made up early in the summer, and throughout the spring its editor was busily employed in consultations with the publishers and in writing to authors, artists, and engravers. The process of making up the annual was generally to select pictures and portraits, engraved copies of which were forwarded to writers asking them to supply tales or poems to the illustrations. For such purpose Lady Blessington and her niece Marguerite Power who had a remarkably fluent style, wrote innumerable verses and sketches. The book also contained articles and essays independent to the plates.

Some of the difficulties and pleasures which the editing of this annual brought Lady Blessington may be gauged from her voluminous correspondence which covers a number of years.

Throughout all her dealings with contributors, her courtesy was unfailing, and went far towards pacifying the injured vanity of writers whose effusions she was obliged to reject. This was the more grateful to authors, who at this time were not accustomed to consideration. One of the women who edited a rival annual used to boast that when an

author weary of expecting an answer to his letters, called in person to demand his manuscript, she 'sent down a drawer full of detached manuscripts to him in her hall, desiring he would take what he pleased'; a piece of vulgarity Lady Blessington was not likely to imitate.

From this correspondence referred to, it may be learned that young Charles Mathews sent her a love poem which she was obliged to decline, but she does so in a manner that could not but have pleased him by the confidence and appreciation it expressed.

'A thousand thanks my dear Charles' she says 'for the verses which are beautiful, but alas a *leetle* too warm for the false prudency of the public taste. Were I to insert them I should have a host of hypercritical hypocrites attacking the warmth of the sentiments of the lines, and the lady-editor: and therefore I must ask you to give me a tale, or verses more prudish—prettier ones you can hardly give me.

'I have been so long a mark for the arrows of slander and attack, that I must be more particular than anyone else: and your pretty verses, which in any of the annuals could not fail to be admired, would in a book edited *by me* draw down attacks. I keep the verses for they are too beautiful not to find a place in my album. What a misery it is, my dear Charles, to live in an age when one must make such sacrifices to cant and false delicacy, and against one's own judgment and taste.'

Then George Cattermole begs her to honour

him with a visit that he may submit two drawings to her notice; Harry Chster writing on Privy Council Office paper wishes to be informed if the *Book of Beauty* is open to his contributions and if so what she pays for poetical effusions: for this young gentleman has written 'some lines which have been approved by those who have seen them—a hundred lines rhyming upon a woman's name,' and he had been recommended to offer them to her. Again a friend wants to know if she would not like 'a little Russian contribution from Lady Londonderry, very pretty and picturesque and written with great simplicity.'

To Captain Marryat she tells something of her bothers.

'I have seldom' she writes 'been more annoyed than on receiving the enclosed half an hour ago. I had thought that, with the omission of the objectionable word, the story, which is full of racy humour, would have been a real treasure for the book, but the ridiculous prudery of a pack of fools compels me to abandon it; for well do I know, that were I to insist on the insertion of the Buckskins, Heath and his trustees—should the sale of the book be less than formerly — would attribute it to you and me.

'After all the trouble I have given you, I dare not ask for anything else, tho' there is no name which I would be more proud to see in my list of contributors than yours; but I must ask you to pardon me for all the

trouble I have inflicted on you, and to believe me,' etc.

There were of course compensations for anxieties and disappointments in the courtesies she received from her friends and contributors. Young Disraeli in a letter which bears no date beginning 'My Dear Lady' tells her 'I sho[d] be mortified if the *Book of Beauty* appeared with[t] my contribution, how[r] trifling. I have something on the stocks for you, but it is too elaborate to finish well in the present tone of my mind; but if you like a Syrian sketch of 4 or 5 pages, you shall have it in 2 or 3 days.'

Later he sends as a contribution 'a literary arabesque which is indeed nonsense. If worthy of admission it might close the volume, as fairies and fireworks dance and glitter in the last scene of a fantastic entertainment. I wish' he adds 'my contribution were worthier, but I get duller every day.'

Then John Kenyon the poet sends her a few stanzas, 'a peppercorn offering' as he writes 'which perhaps I am, after all not justified in doing, for probably the muses like other ladies, should wait till they are asked. I have endeavoured to condense into them the associations which grow out of Italy. Who can judge better than you can whether I have succeeded well or ill? But do not I beg of you think yourself bound to accept my offering. I shall not turn vindictive like Cain, though your discretion may refuse it. I shall still continue to think the verses

excellent verses, and only conceit that they do not happen to suit your particular views for this year's book; and you will have too much courtesy and kindliness to clear away my delusion.'

Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton, reminds her that months before he had given her an Irish ballad which had not appeared. 'If you want any second piece' he writes 'it is at your service, but I had better not give it unless you want it, as your publishers had last year the trouble of printing a poem which turned out to have been published before.'

Then Lord John Manners, afterwards seventh Duke of Rutland, says in a charming little note 'You will laugh when I tell you that I have for several days been bothering my brains at your request, having literally not written one line since I published my little volume. I am really and truly ashamed of sending such doggerel, but do in all honesty implore you not to insert the accompanying stanzas if you have anything else wherewith to supply their place.'

And all the way from Hartford, Connecticut, Mrs Sigourney the poetess writes that she has seen the *Book of Beauty* and the *Keepsake*, an annual which was subsequently edited by Lady Blessington, 'embellishing the centre tables of some of our aristocracy, for we are not so pure a Republic as to have no shadow of aristocracy, and we give too much prominence perhaps, to that which is based solely on wealth.

The beauty of your engravings' she continues 'might almost discourage our attempt at annuals on this side of the water. I searched and read first, all from your pen which those volumes contained. Is the Miss Power who has written an interesting article in the *Keepsake* one of those beautiful nieces whom I met at your house?'

Bulwer writes that he cannot disguise he has strong objections to contributing to annuals, for if he writes for one he is immediately entangled by others, who less kind than Lady Blessington, take a refusal as a deadly offence. Therefore knowing she greatly exaggerated the value of his assistance, he could have wished to be a reader of the *Book of Beauty* rather than a contributor.

'But the moment you seriously ask me to aid you' he continues 'and gravely convince yourself that I can be of service, all objection vanishes. I owe to you a constant, a generous, a forbearing kindness which nothing can repay; but which it delights me to prove that I can at least remember. And consequently you will enrol me at once amongst your ministering genii of the lamp.

'You gave me my choice of verse or prose —I should prefer the first: but consider well whether it would be of equal service to you. That is my sole object, and whichever the most conduces to it will be to me the most agreeable means. You can therefore consider, and let me know, and lastly pray give me all the time you can spare.

'To prove to you that I am a mercenary ally, let me name my reward. Will you give me one of the engravings of yourself in the *Book of Beauty*. It does not do you justice it is true, but I should like to number it amongst those mementoes which we keep by us as symbols at once of reality and the ideal. Alas, all inspiration dies except that of beauty.'

Still untiring, Lady Blessington devoted herself to her work, and was now busy in writing a novel called *The Two Friends* which was published in the following year. The reward of her labours enabled her at this period to meet her expenses, and to aid the relatives who depended on her. She also made efforts towards rescuing Count D'Orsay from the mire of debt into which he was continually plunging—though her efforts usually were made in vain. 'I am delighted to see' writes Sir William Gell to her 'that the spirit of order you always possessed and which has done so much good on other occasions, has enabled you to take care of such of your friends as have less foresight than yourself.'

Meanwhile her correspondence with her friends continued, she finding leisure to help them when they needed her aid.

In a letter dated April 8th 1834 Landor tells her that for some time past he has been composing *The Citation and Examination of Wil. Shakespeare, Euseby Treen, Joseph Carneby, and Silas Gough, before the Worshipful Sir Thomas Lucy, Knight, touching deer-stalking, on the 19th day of September in the year of*

grace 1582, *now first published from original papers.*

'This is full of fun' he writes 'I know not whether of wit. It is the only thing I ever wrote that is likely to sell. It contains about 300 pp. If I send it, will you have the kindness to offer it to Colburn, not as mine—though probably he may recollect my handwriting. If he prints it, he shall give me two hundred pounds for it. No other publisher can give it so extensive a circulation, otherwise I would rather burn it than he should have it.'

In May of the same year he gives a letter of introduction to be presented to her by N. P. Willis 'an American gentleman attached to the Legation at Paris.' It is not however in that character Landor wishes to introduce him 'but in that of the best poet the New World has produced in any part of it.' He adds that Mr Willis will bring her the *Examination of Shakespeare.* 'If you offer it to Colburn pray do nothing more. It is the only thing I ever wrote that ever can be popular. I will venture a wager that two thousand copies are sold in six months. I expect the man to give me two hundred pounds. However, two hundred pounds are not worth two hundred words from you. Do not spend upon it more than half a dozen, when your notepaper lies before you.'

Colburn however would have nothing to do with the *Examination*, learning which Lady Blessington sent for Mr Otley, member of the publishing firm of Saunders & Otley,

whom she thought likely to produce it, and Mr Otley was willing to bring out the work, the profits of which were to be devoted to a friend of the author. When however Landor next writes he tells her his zeal has quite evaporated for the man he hoped to benefit by the publication. 'I find' he says 'my old school-fellow (whom, by-the-bye, I never knew, but who placed enough confidence in me to beg my assistance in his distress) has been gaming. Had he even tried but a trifle of assassination, I should have felt for him; or, in fact, had he done almost anything else. But to rely on superior skill in spoliation is less pardonable than to rely on superior courage, or than to avenge an affront in a sudden and summary way.

'Now a thousand thanks for the trouble you have taken. MM. Saunders and Otley ought to hazard nothing by me. I hope they hazard little. It would be dishonourable in me to accept all they offer. I will not take the entire profits. I will take half and shall be glad if they begin to print the volume as soon as they conveniently can. I will pay for the dozen copies I give my friends, for I really have a dozen of one kind or other.'

The letter of introduction which Landor had given to N. P. Willis was duly presented on that individual's arrival in London. Willis who was then in his twenty-eighth year, had begun life as a type-setter in the office of his father, the editor and proprietor of *The*

Recorder and *The Youthful Companion.* A remarkably smart and enterprising man, N. P. Willis had at the age of two-and-twenty established *The American Monthly Magazine,* which a couple of years later was merged into *The New York Mirror.*

Whilst connected with these publications he had written verses and sketches which were highly praised, and his career was looked forward to as one of promise. His pen was versatile and fluent, his nature enthusiastic, refined and ambitious. And throughout his youth his eyes had been turned towards Europe which he ardently longed to behold. No sooner therefore did circumstances permit, than leaving *The New York Mirror* to the care of his partner, he crossed the Atlantic, all the wonders of the old world to see.

On arriving at Paris he was made an attaché of the American ministry, a privilege to which no salary and no responsibility were attached, but which carried with it a certain recommendation to social circles that would not otherwise be opened to its holder. N. P. Willis availed himself of whatever advantage this nominal attachéship procured him: and as his income largely depended on his pen, he, who may be described as the forerunner of the personal paragrapher, wrote letters to his paper, detailing the peculiarities of the distinguished people he encountered, with a frankness and freedom which was later to be resented by his victims.

Personally he was tall and well-formed,

with a round fresh-coloured, smiling face, the features small and regular, the eyes light blue and large, his long hair tinged with red. His manners were bland, exceedingly pliant, and persuasive. Harriet Martineau to whom he was introduced, described him as a 'buxom gentleman' and adds 'there was something rather engaging in the round face, brisk air and *enjouement* of the young man: but his conscious dandyism and unparalleled self-complacency, spoiled the satisfaction though they increased the inclination to laugh. He placed himself in an attitude of infinite ease, and whipped his little bright boot with a little bright cane.'

The pictures he presented to his readers of Lady Blessington and her circle have the advantage of being painted by one whose nature was highly impressionable, one to whose attentive eyes all places and persons in this country were novel.

On the second day after his arrival in London he called at Seamore Place at a rather early hour and was told by the powdered footman that her ladyship had not yet come down to breakfast. With this individual he left his letter of introduction together with his address, and in the course of a few hours received an invitation from Lady Blessington to call that evening at ten o'clock.

On obeying he was shown into the library 'lined alternately with splendidly-bound books and mirrors, and with a deep window of the

breadth of the room opening upon Hyde Park,' where he found the Countess alone. 'The picture to my eye' writes the American poet 'as the door opened was a very lovely one: a woman of remarkable beauty half-buried in a *fauteuil* of yellow satin, reading by a magnificent lamp suspended from the centre of the arched ceiling: sofas, couches, ottomans, and busts arranged in rather a crowded sumptuousness through the room; enamel tables covered with expensive and elegant trifles in every corner; and a delicate white hand relieved on the back of a book, to which the eye was attracted by the blaze of its diamond rings. As the servant mentioned my name she rose and gave me her hand very cordially.'

Their conversation turned on America and 'in a voice merry and sad by turns but always musical' she told him she received a great many letters from his country people written in the most extraordinary style of compliment, of which she hardly knew what to make.

He assured her that vast numbers of cultured people lived in great seclusion in America, and depended for amusement on books, which led them to consider the author they admired a personal friend.

'And do you think' she asked 'these are the people who write to me? If I could think so I should be exceedingly happy. A great proportion of the people of England are refined down to such heartlessness; criticism,

private and public is so much influenced by politics, that it is really delightful to know there is a more generous tribunal. Indeed I think many of our authors now are beginning to write for America.'

She was anxious to know if Bulwer and Disraeli were popular in the United States, and promised to introduce him to those writers if he called the following evening. This of course he did when he found 'she had deserted her exquisite library for the drawing-room, and sat in fuller dress, with six or seven gentlemen around her' to whom he was presented. Amongst these were James Smith, hale and handsome, with white hair and a nobly formed head: Henry Bulwer small slight and faintly pitted with smallpox: and Albany Fonblanque proprietor and editor of the *Examiner* a staunch friend of Lady Blessington. N. P. Willis in describing this distinguished writer who was universally esteemed says he never saw a worse face 'sallow, seamed and hollow, his teeth irregular, his skin livid, his straight black hair uncombed and straggling over his forehead. A hollow croaking voice, and a small fiery black eye, with a smile like a skeleton's, certainly did not improve his physiognomy. He sat upon his chair very awkwardly and was very ill-dressed, but every word he uttered showed him to be a man of claims very superior to exterior attraction.' The Duc de Richelieu; a German prince with a star upon his breast, and Count D'Orsay were amongst the com-

pany. Towards midnight Bulwer was announced when with a joyous heartiness like a boy let out of school he ran forward to shake hands with his hostess and her guests and was introduced to Willis who found his voice 'lover-like and sweet' and his conversation 'gay, quick, various, half-satirical and always fresh and different from everybody else. He seemed to talk because he could not help it, and infected everybody with his spirits.'

As to his personal appearance Willis described him as 'short, very much bent in the back, slightly knock-kneed, and as ill-dressed a man for a gentleman as you will find in London. His figure is slight and very badly put together, and the only commendable point in his person, was the smallest foot I ever saw a man stand upon.' His head was phrenologically a fine one, but his forehead though broad, retreated very much. His nose was aquiline, far too large for proportion 'though he conceals its extreme prominence in an immense pair of red whiskers, which entirely conceal the lower part of his face in profile.' His complexion was fair, his auburn hair profuse, his eye not remarkable and his mouth contradictory, whilst 'a more good-natured, habitually smiling, nerveless expression could hardly be imagined.'

Again the question of his popularity in America became the subject of conversation, when Lady Blessington proposed to take him to that country and exhibit him at so much a head. She asked Willis if he did not think

it would be a good speculation, to which he replied that provided she played the showman the concern would surely draw.

Bulwer declared he would prefer to go in disguise and hear them abuse his books; for he thought it would be pleasant to learn the opinions of people who judged him neither as a Member of Parliament nor a dandy, but simply as a bookmaker. James Smith then asked him if he kept an amanuensis, to which the author of *Pelham* replied 'No, I scribble it all out myself, and send it to the press in a most ungentlemanlike hand, half print and half hieroglyphic, with all its imperfections on its head, and correct in the proof—very much to the dissatisfaction of the publisher, who sends me in a bill of sixteen pounds six shillings and fourpence for extra corrections. Then I am free to confess I don't know grammar. Lady Blessington do you know grammar? I detest grammar. There never was such a thing heard of before Lindley Murray. I wonder what they did for grammar before his day. Oh, the delicious blunders one sees when they are irretrievable; and the best of it is the critics never get hold of them. Thank heaven for second editions, that one may scratch out his blots, and go down clean and gentlemanlike to posterity.' When asked if he had ever reviewed one of his own books he declared he hadn't, but that he could. And then how he would recriminate and defend himself. He would be preciously severe, for he thought nobody knew a book's

defects half so well as its author, and he had a great idea of criticising his works for his posthumous memoirs. The company broke up about three in the morning, when N. P. Willis hastened to write down his impressions of Lady Blessington's *salon* for the *New York Mirror.*

So elated was he by the reception given him by Lady Blessington, by this introduction to her distinguished friends, and by the prospects looming before him, that next day he wrote to his sister. 'All the best society of London exclusives is now open to me—*me* a sometime apprentice at setting types—*me* without a sou in the world beyond what my pen brings me, and with not only no influence from friends at home, but a world of envy and slander at my back. Thank heaven there is not a countryman of mine, except Washington Irving, who has even the standing in England which I have got *in three days only.* I should not boast of it if I had not been wounded and stung to the quick by the calumnies and falsehoods of every description which come to me from America. But let it pass.'

He tells her he had been invited to contribute to the *Metropolitan Monthly*, the *Court Magazine* and the *New Monthly*, and for a short tale written for the second of these, had received eight guineas. He lodged in Cavendish Square, the most fashionable part of the town where he paid a guinea a week for his lodgings, and was 'as well off

as if he had been the son of the President with as much as he could spend in the year. Except for his family he had forgotten everybody in America.'

Lady Blessington who liked the young American resolved to introduce him to other of her friends whom he particularly wished to know: and among various services which her powerful influence rendered him, was her gaining him admission to the Travellers Club. On his part he was devoted to so kindly a friend, to so charming a hostess. Writing to thank Landor for his introduction to her, N. P. Willis says,—'She is my load-star and most valued friend, for whose acquaintance I am so much indebted to you, that you will find it difficult in your lifetime to diminish my obligations. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

A few days later than his visit to Lady Blessington, he went to Ascot races, where he had the happiness of seeing William the Fourth, his queen, whom Willis thought the plainest woman in the Kingdom, and the young Princess Victoria whom he predicted would be sold poor thing, bartered away by those great dealers in human hearts 'whose grand calculations will not be much consolation to her if she happens to have a taste of her own.' Crabbe Robinson, to whom Landor had given him letters of introduction asked the American poet to breakfast that he might meet Charles and Mary Lamb, and afterward Lady Blessington invited him to dinner.

Here he met Lord Durham, Fonblanque, Lord Albert Conyngham, Disraeli, Bulwer and his brother, Barry Cornwall, and of course Count D'Orsay. Lord Durham, he says 'if he passed for a lord at all in America would pass for a very ill-dressed one.' Disraeli was magnificent. He sat in a window looking out upon Hyde Park 'with the last rays of daylight reflected from the gorgeous gold flowers of a splendidly-embroidered waistcoat. Patent leather pumps, a white stick with a black cord and tassel, and a quantity of chains about his neck and pockets served to make him a conspicuous object.' Then as to his appearance, he was lividly pale and but for the energy of his action and strength of his lungs might seem a victim to consumption. His eye was black as Erebus and had the most mocking lying-in-wait expression imaginable; whilst his mouth was 'alive with a kind of working and impatient nervousness, and when he has burst forth as he does constantly with a particularly successful cataract of expression, it assumes a curl of triumphant scorn that would be worthy of a Mephistopheles. His hair is as extraordinary as his taste in waistcoats. A thick heavy mass of jet black ringlets falls over his left cheek almost to his collarless stock, while on the right temple it is parted and put away with the smooth carefulness of a girl's.'

Bulwer was badly dressed but wore a flashy waistcoat of the same description as Disraeli.

Count D'Orsay was 'very splendid but undefinable. He seemed showily dressed till you looked to particulars, and then it seemed only a simple thing fitted to a very magnificent person.'

Barry Cornwall was a small man with a remarkably timid manner. His eyes were deep sunk and had a quick and restless fire: his brows were heavy: his voice had the huskiness and elevation of a man more accustomed to think than to converse.

It was impossible to convey the evanescent and pure spirit of the conversation of wits as it flashed around the dinner-table. New poems, novels, and authors were discussed, amongst others Beckford, who of all present was only known to Disraeli. The manner in which he pictured this extraordinary man, bewildered Willis, who says 'I might as well attempt to gather up the foam of the sea as to convey an idea of the extraordinary language in which he clothed his description. There were at least five words in every sentence that must have been very much astonished at the use they were put to, and yet no others apparently could so well have conveyed his idea. He talked like a race-horse approaching the winning-post, every muscle in action, and the utmost energy of expression flung out into every burst.'

Bulwer of course talked vivaciously and D'Orsay kept up a running fire of comment half in French, half in English. Fonblanque

and Lord Durham 'with his Brutus head' held grave political discourse and in this way the hours fled till midnight passed and morning came.

His bright manners and persuasive personality, won N. P. Willis friends in high places at a time when visitors from the younger country were a novelty; and in the autumn he found himself a guest of the Duke of Gordon. The society which here surrounded him was not so congenial as that of the literary and artistic set which he found in Lady Blessington's home; and writing to her at this time he says:—'I am in a place which wants nothing but the sunshine of heaven and your presence (the latter by much the greater want), and I should while away the morning in gazing out upon its lovely park, were I not doomed to find a provoking pleasure (more than in anything else) in writing to you.

'I am laid up with the gout (parole) and a prisoner to my own thoughts—thanks to Lady Blessington, sweet and dear ones.

'I left Dalhousie a week ago, and returned to Edinburgh. I breakfasted *tête-à-tête* with Wilson, who gave me execrable food but brilliant conversation, and dined with Jeffrey, who had all the distinction of Auld Reekie at his table, besides Count Flahault and Lady Keith. His dinner was *merveilleux* for Scotland, but I heard nothing worth remembering, and spent my time talking to an old solicitor, C., and in watching the contortions of a lady who out-B.'s B. in *crispations nerveuses.*

'I went afterwards to a ball, and then sat down, as I do after coming from your house, to make a mem. of the good things I had heard; but the page under that date is still innocent of a syllable. Oh, you have no idea, dear Lady Blessington, in what a brilliant atmosphere you live, compared with the dull world abroad. I long to get back to you.

'From Edinboro' I meant to have come north by Loch Leven, but my ankle swelled suddenly, and was excessively painful, and the surgeon forbad me to set it to the ground, so I took the steamer for Aberdeen, and lay on a sofa in that detestable place for four days, when the Duke of Gordon wrote to me to come and nurse it at the castle; and here I am, just able to crawl down slipshod to dinner.

'The house is full of people. Lord Aberdeen, who talks to me all the time, and who is kind enough to give me a frank to you, is here with his son and daughter (she is a tall and very fine girl, and very conversable), and Lord and Lady Morton, and Lord Stormont, and Colonel Gordon, Lord Aberdeen's brother, and the Duchess of Richmond, and three or four other ladies, and half-a-dozen other gentlemen, whom I do not know; altogether, a party of twenty-two. There is a Lady something, very pale, tall, and haughty, twenty-three, and sarcastic, whom I sat next at dinner yesterday—a woman I come as near an antipathy for, as is possible, with a very handsome face for an apology. She entertained me with a tirade

against human nature generally, and one or two individuals particularly, in a tone which was quite unnatural in a woman.

'I have had a letter from Chorley, who says Rothwell has done wonders with your portrait, and has succeeded in what I believed he never would do—getting the character all into his picture.

'I wish the art of transferring would extend to taking images from the heart; I should believe then that an adequate likeness of you were possible. I envy Rothwell the happiness of merely working on it. If he takes half the pleasure in it that I do in transferring to my memory the features of your mind, he would get a princely price for his portrait.

'I am delighted with the Duke and Duchess. He is a delightful, hearty old fellow, full of fun and conversation; and she is an uncommonly fine woman, and, without beauty, has something agreeable in her countenance. She plays well and sings tolerably, and, on the whole, I like her. *Pour moi-même*, I get on everywhere better than in your presence. I only fear I talk too much; but all the world is particularly civil to me, and among a score of people, no one of whom I had ever seen yesterday, I find myself quite at home to-day—*grace à Dieu!*

'I have no idea when I shall leave here, my elephant leg being at present the arbiter of my fate. I hope, however, to be at Dalhousie by the 1st of October. Shall I find there the present I most value—a letter from your Ladyship?

'Pray give my warmest regards to D'Orsay and Barry; and believe me, dear Lady Blessington, ever faithfully yours,' etc.

It was to Willis that Lady Blessington said Disraeli the elder had asked her to take care of Benjamin for his sake. 'He is a clever lad' remarked the author of the *Curiosities of Literature* 'but he wants ballast. I am glad he has the honour to know you, for you will check him sometimes when I am away.'

Be this as it may, a strong friendship existed between Disraeli in whom she had faith from the first, and Lady Blessington who had early gained his admiration and affection. Three letters written by him to her in this year—1834—indicate the intimate feelings with which he regarded her; and likewise throw sidelights on his own life at this time. Both are written from his father's house, Bradenham, the first being dated August the 5th; the second bearing no other date than this year, whilst the third was written on the 17th of October. They run as follows:—

'MY DEAR LADY BLESSINGTON,—I was so sorry to leave London with[t] being a moment alone with you; but altho' I came to the opera the last night on purpose, Fate was against us. I did not reach this place until Sunday, very ill indeed from the pangs of parting. Indeed, I feel as desolate as a ghost, & I do not think that I ever shall be able to settle to anything again. It is a great shame, when people are happy together, that they sho be ever separated; but it seems

the great object of all human legislation that people never sho[d] be happy together.

'My father I find better than I expected, & much cheered by my presence. I delivered him all your kind messages. He is now very busy on his *History of English Literature*, in which he is far advanced. I am mistaken if you will not delight in these volumes. They are full of new views of the history of our language, & indeed of our country, for the history of a State is necessarily mixed up with the history of its literature.

'For myself, I am doing nothing. The western breeze favors an *al fresco* existence, & I am seated with a pipe under a spreading sycamore, solemn as a pacha.

'I wish you would induce Hookham to entrust me with *Agathon*, that mad Byronic novel.

'What do you think of the modern French novelists, and is it worth my while to read them, and if so, what do you recommend me? What of Balzac, is he better than Sue & Geo: Sandt Dudevant and are these inferior to Hugo? I ask you these questions because you will give me short answers, like all people who are masters of their subject.

'I suppose it is vain to hope to see my dear D'Orsay here; I wish indeed he wo[d] come. Here is a cook by no means contemptible. He can bring his horses if he like, but I can mount him. Adieu, d[r] Lady Blessington, some day I will try to write you a more amusing letter; at present I am in truth ill & sad.'

'DEAREST LADY BLESSINGTON,—I have intended to return the books & send you these few lines every day, & am surprized that I co[d] have so long omitted doing anything so agreeable as writing to you. We are all delighted with the portraits, my sister is collecting those of all my father's friends; her collection will include almost every person of literary celebrity from the end of y[e] Johnsonian era, so your fair face arrived just in time. I am particularly delighted with Parris's port[t], w[ch] I had never seen before. . . .

'I have read y[e] art[e] on Coleridge in y[e] Quarterly, but do not agree with you in holding it to be written by Lockhart. It is too good. L.'s style has certainly the merit of being peculiar. I know none so meagre, harsh & clumsy, or more felicitous in the jumble of common-place metaphors. I think y[e] present reviewal must be by Nelson Coleridge, a nephew of y[e] poet & a cleverish sort of fellow, tho a prig.

'You give me the same advice as my father ever has done about dotting down the evanescent feelings of youth: but like other excellent advice I fear it will prove unprofitable. I have a horror of journalising and indeed of writing of all description. With me execution is ever a labour & conception a delight. Although a great traveller I never kept a diary in my life.'

'MY DEAR LADY BLESSINGTON,—My absence at Quarter Sessions, where I was bored to death, prevented me instantly answering your letter.

I hope, however, you will receive this before your departure. I sympathise with your sufferings; my experience unhappily assures me how ably you describe them. This golden autumn ought to have cured us all. I myself, in spite of the sunshine, have been a great invalid. Indeed, I know not how it is, but I am never well save in action, & then I feel immortal. I am ashamed of being "nervous." Dyspepsia always makes me wish for a civil war. In the meantime, I amuse myself by county politics. I received yesterday a letter, most spritely & amusing, from Bulwer dated Limerick. He is about to return to Dublin, & talks of going to Spain. I am ashamed that I must confess to him that I have not read *Pompeii*, but alas, a London bookseller treats us provincials with great contempt, & in spite of reiterated epistles & promises as numerous I have not yet received the much-wished tomes. My father sends his kindest regards. As for myself, I am dying for action, & rust like a Damascus sabre in y^e^ sheathe of a poltroon.

'Adieu! dear friend, we shall meet on your return.'

Another man whom Lady Blessington liked and esteemed, was Henry Bulwer, the elder brother of the novelist. Henry Bulwer, delicate and refined in appearance, concealed under a naturally languid manner, that keen observation, penetration of character, and force of will which subsequently raised him to the high offices he filled in the diplomatic service. His

lovable disposition made him universally popular: had he pleased he could have distinguished himself in literature. Whilst at Cambridge in his twenty-first year, he published a volume of graceful verses: but instead of wooing the muses he entered the army the following year, leaving it for diplomacy before he was thirty, when he became an attaché at Berlin. By a singular coincidence, he, like his brother the novelist, gained a large sum in a single night. Whilst passing through Paris he visited a gambling house where he won between six and seven thousand pounds.

From Berlin he was transferred to Vienna, and from there to the Hague. In 1826 he recorded his experiences in the Morea, in a work called *An Autumn in Greece;* and in 1834 published the first part of an important work entitled *France, Social Literary and Political,* the latter part of which was brought out in the following year. To assure him of the success of his efforts, Lady Blessington wrote him in a letter, dated November the 6th; in which she begins by telling him it gave her great pleasure to hear from him and it gave her scarcely less pleasure to be able to tell him of the success of his book. She had read it with the acuteness of a critic, increased by the nervous anxiety of a friend. Feeling satisfied of its merit she was desirous of drawing general attention to the work as far as lay in her power, by recommending it to all her acquaintances, and commenting on it in her *salon* every evening.

'Many people' she continues 'are too idle or indolent to take the trouble of judging for themselves; a book must be pointed out to them as worthy of being read; and the rest, the merits of a good book will insure. Yours has been a regular *hit*, as the booksellers call it; a better proof of which I cannot give you, than that on Saturday last, a copy of the first edition was not to be procured for love or money. It is not only praised but bought, and has placed you very high on the literary ladder. Go on and prosper; your success furnishes an incitement that the first work of few authors ever gave, and it would be unpardonable not to persevere in a path that offers such brilliant encouragement. . . .

'I never fear genius and worth, it is only the egotistical irritability of mediocrity that I fear and shun. It grieves me when I see men like Fonblanque misunderstood or undervalued, and it is only at such moments that I am ambitious; for I should like to have *power* wholly and *solely* for doing justice to merit, and drawing into the sunshine of Fortune those who ought to be placed at the top of her wheel, with a drag to prevent that wheel revolving.

'*Pompeii* has covered its author with glory; everyone talks of, everyone praises it. What a noble creature your brother is; such sublime genius, joined to such deep, such true feeling. He is too superior to be understood in this age of pigmies, where each little animal thinks only of self and its little

clique, and are jealous of the giants who stood between them and the sun, intercepting from them all its rays. "Without these giants" say they "what brightness would be ours, but they keep all the sun to themselves."'

CHAPTER V

Letters from Lord Abinger, Bulwer and Landor—Recollections of Florence—Landor leaves Fiesole—Lady Blessington writes to Madame Guiccioli—Removal to Gore House—Correspondence with Landor and Captain Marryat—Prince Louis Napoleon—John Forster.

THE novel called *The Two Friends* at which Lady Blessington had worked continually during the previous year, was published in January 1835. And now the excitement of producing the book began to subside, she like many another author, was beset by nervous fears for its fate at the hands of those sitting in judgment on her work. On this point many of her friends hastened to reassure her. One of the first to write to her concerning the novel was James Scarlett, who had been appointed Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, the previous year, and in this, 1835, was raised to the peerage as Baron Abinger.

He begins by replying to an invitation to dinner she had sent him: saying he could refuse her nothing.

'A very severe and lasting cold & cough almost unfit me for company, but if I do not get worse, I will surely join you on Friday, hoping that you will excuse my propensity to *bark*, as it does not arise from hydrophobia—on the contrary, I drink nothing but water.

'I have made acquaintance with *The Two Friends*, and relish them much. In truth. I have devoted two successive midnight hours to them. I like the book; the characters are well drawn, the incidents well imagined, the interest well kept up, the sentiments of a high moral cast, and the composition occasionally rises into great elegance, and is always marked by correct feeling, well expressed. After so much of commendation, you will, I know, receive as well one critical remark. Had I been at your elbow when you wrote, I wo[d] not have allowed you to make use, of two or three words which I dislike; one is *agreeability* which, if English, is not agreeable, and therefore does not suit you. But it is not English: *agreeableness* is the right word. Another is the word *mentally*, which, though a good word, has been so much abused by some indifferent writers, that I have taken a dislike to it, and wo[d] banish it from the novels of my friends. I do not recollect any other.'

Bulwer also wrote her an interesting letter regarding the book in which he says:—

'I don't (pardon me) believe a word you say about *The Two Friends*. If it have no

passion it may be an admirable novel nevertheless. Miss Edgeworth has no passion—and who in her line excels her?

'As to your own doubts they foretell your success. I have always found one is never so successful as when one is least sanguine. I fell into the deepest despondency about *Pompeii* and *Eugene Aram;* and was certain, nay most presumptuous about *Devereux* which is the least generally popular of my writings. Your feelings of distrust are presentiments to be read backward: they are the happiest omen. But I will tell you all about it—Brougham like—when I have read the book. . . .

'Reflection in one's chamber and action in the world are the best critics. With them we can dispense with other teachers; without them all teachers are in vain. "Fool" says Sidney in the *Arcadia,* "Fool look in thy heart and write."'

On the 19th of January he writes to her again saying: 'If I should be well enough the day after to-morrow, I should then be enchanted if you would let me accompany you in your drive for an hour, and revive me by your agreeable news of politics, literature, and the world.

'I have just landed from the three volume voyage of *Peter Simple.* The characters are exaggerated out of all truth, and the incidents, such as changing children, shutting up the true heir in a madhouse etc., are at once stale and impossible. But despite this Marryatt has a frank, dashing genius, and splashes about the

water in grand style. He writes like a man, and that is more than most of the other novelists do, who have neither the vigour of one sex, nor the refinement of the other.'

A few days after his drive with her, a wild report spread through the town, stating that Bulwer was dead, on which Lady Blessington immediately dispatched a messenger to ascertain if the news were true. In writing on the 24th of the month to thank her he says: 'The reports concerning me appear to "progress" in a regular climax. First I had not a shilling, and an execution was in my house; then I was bought by the Tories, and now I am dead. They have taken away fortune, honesty, and lastly life itself. Such are the pleasures of reputation.

'Just before you sent, Lady Charlotte Bury was also pleased to dispatch a message to know at what hour I had departed this world? Three other successive deputations arrived, and this morning on opening a Lincoln paper, I found that there too it had been reported "that their excellent representative was no more." I consider that I have paid the debt of nature—that I am virtually dead—that I am born again with a new lease—and that the years I have hitherto lived are to be struck off the score of the fresh life I have this morning awakened to.

'I believe my dearest friend that you were shocked with the report, and would in your kind heart have grieved for its truth. So would four or five others; and the rest would have

been pleased at the excitement; it would have been something to talk about before the meeting of Parliament.

'I am now going to plunge into *Histories of China*, light my pipe, read a page, and muse an hour, and be very dull and melancholy for the rest of the evening, still it is some consolation to think one is not—dead.'

Although Lady Blessington had forwarded to Landor a copy of her *Conversations* on its publication, it did not, through delay in its transmission, reach his Tuscan home until March 1835.

Thereon he wrote to express his 'thanks upon thanks for making him think Byron a better and a wiser man than he had thought him' and in the same letter he goes on to say:—

'Mr Robinson, the soundest man that ever stepped through the trammels of law, gave me, a few days ago, the sorrowful information that another of our great writers has joined Coleridge. Poor Charles Lamb, what a tender, good, joyous heart had he. What playfulness, what purity of style and thought. His sister is yet living, much older than himself. One of her tales in Mrs Leicester's School is, with the sole exception of the *Bride of Lammermoor*, the most beautiful tale in prose composition in any language, ancient or modern. A young girl has lost her mother, the father marries again, and marries a friend of his former wife. The child is ill reconciled to it, but being dressed in new clothes for the marriage, she runs up to her mother's chamber, filled with the idea how happy that dear mother

would be at seeing her in all her glory—not reflecting, poor soul, that it was only by her mother's death that she appeared in it. How natural, how novel is all this. Did you ever imagine that a fresh source of the pathetik would burst forth before us in this trodden and hardened world? I never did, and when I found myself upon it, I pressed my temples with both hands, and tears ran down to my elbows.

'The opium-eater calls Coleridge "the largest and most spacious intellect, the subtlest and most comprehensive that has yet existed among men." Impiety to Shakspeare, treason to Milton, I give up the rest, even Bacon. Certainly, since their days, we have seen nothing at all comparable to him. Byron and Scott were but as gun-flints to a granite mountain; Wordsworth has one angle of resemblance; Southey has written more, and all well, much admirably. Fonblanque has said grand things about me; but I sit upon the earth with my heels under me, looking up devoutly to this last glorious ascension. Never ask me about the rest. If you do, I shall only answer in the cries that you are very likely to hear at this moment from your window, "Ground ivy, ground ivy, ground ivy."'

To this Lady Blessington made answer that she was glad her book had given him a better opinion of Byron, who was one of the many proofs of a superior nature spoilt by civilisation. The evil began when he was a schoolboy and continued its baneful influence over him to the last moments of his life.

'But then there were outbreakings of the original goodness of the soil, though over-cultivation had deteriorated it. His first impulses were always good, and it was only the reflections suggested by experience that checked them. Then consider that he died when only thirty-seven years old. The passions had not ceased to torment, though they no longer wholly governed him. He was arrived at that period in human life, when he saw the fallacy of the past, without having grasped the wisdom of the future. Had ten years been added to his existence, he would have been a better and a happier man. Are not goodness and happiness the nearest approach to synonymous terms?'

She adds that she has sent him her two novels, though she fears they will not interest him, because 'they are written on the every-day business of life, without once entering the region of imagination. I wrote because I wanted money; and was obliged to select the subjects that would command it from my publisher. None but ephemeral ones will now catch the attention of the mass of readers.'

She sees his friend Crabbe Robinson sometimes, but not so often as she could wish. 'We talk of you every time we meet' she continues 'and are selfish enough to wish you were near us in this cold and murky climate. If you knew how much I value your letters, you would write to me very very often; they breathe of Italy and take me back to other and happier times. Do you

remember our calm evenings on the terrace of the Casa Pelosi, where by the light of the moon we looked upon the smooth and glassy Arno, and talked of past ages? Those were happy times and I frequently revert to them.

'The verses in your letter pleased me much, as do all that you write. What have you been doing lately? What a capital book might be written illustrative of the passions, when they stood forth more boldly than at present, in the middle ages. The history of Italy teems with such, and you might give them vitality.'

Lady Blessington was destined to see her correspondent and friend much sooner than she expected: for in the spring of the year Landor left Florence fully determined to settle in England, being driven from his home by domestic troubles, the chief of which was that his nagging wife had used language before their children which deeply wounded him.

The scene that brought his vexations to a crisis occurred when an English friend, Armitage Brown, was present at dinner. On the latter being subsequently asked to make a statement of what he had witnessed in justification of Landor's action, Armitage Brown wrote that he grieved to be ungracious to one who had uniformly treated him with the utmost courtesy and kindness as Mrs Landor had 'but there are certain words' he adds 'which once uttered, whether directed towards myself or my friend, cancel every obligation; nor can I affect to feel their power lessened

on account of their being uttered by the wife of my friend.' He declares himself ashamed to write down the words spoken by Mrs Landor; to hear them was painful. 'I am afraid' he says to the disconsolate husband 'my patience would have left me in a tenth part of the time; but you to my astonishment sat with a composed countenance, never once making use of an uncivil expression, unless the following may be so considered, when after about an hour she seemed exhausted. "I beg madam, you will if you think proper, proceed; as I have made up my mind from the first, to endure at least twice as much as you have been yet pleased to speak." . . . For more than eleven years I have been intimate with you,' continues this correspondent 'and during that time frequenting your house, I never once saw you behave towards Mrs Landor otherwise than with the most gentlemanly demeanour, while your love for your children was unbounded. I was always aware that you gave entire control into her hands over the children, the servants, and the management of the house; and when vexed or annoyed at anything, I could not but remark that you were in the habit of requesting the cause to be remedied or removed, as a favour to yourself. All this I have more than once repeated to Mrs Landor in answer to her accusations against you which I could never well comprehend. When I have elsewhere heard you accused of being a violent man, I have frankly acknowledged it; limiting however

your violence to persons guilty of meanness, roguery, or duplicity; by which I meant and said, that you utterly lost your temper with Italians.

This departure from the children he worshipped, the home, and the land he loved, was a heartbreak to poor Landor. As he wrote 'Fiesole and Valdarno must be dreams hereafter' to him. He told Southey it was not willingly he left Tuscany. 'There was but one spot upon earth' he stated 'on which I had fixed my heart, and four objects on which my affection rested. That they might not hear every day such language as no decent person should hear once, nor despise both parents, I left the only delight of my existence.'

Friends tried to make peace and to induce Landor to return, amongst them Mr Ravenshaw who had married a sister of Mrs Landor; but to him the author made such a detailed statement of his grievances, that their hearer agreed Landor had strong grounds for his action, and no longer urged him to re-seek the home he had quitted.

Upon leaving Italy he had transferred the villa and farms at Fiesole to his son and out of his income of six hundred a year allowed Mrs Landor two-thirds of that sum.

Lady Blessington warmly welcomed and gave him that sympathy he had learned to expect from her and now sadly required. It was not however his intention to remain in London, but rather to take up his residence

among his own people at Bath, where he went after a short stay in town. But throughout the years that followed he visited London at odd intervals and rarely failed to see Lady Blessington. On one occasion, when in the September of this year he called at Seamore Place, she happened to be in Hampshire in search of health. They were disappointed at not meeting.

'I had heard of your having passed through London before I got your letter' she wrote 'and console myself for not having seen you, by the hope that on your way back you will give me a few days of your society, that we may talk over old friends and old times, one of the few comforts (though it is a melancholy one) that age gives.'

In the autumn of the year the Countess Guiccioli was again in England, a country which had become dear because of the appreciative welcome its society had extended to her. Now however she was little disposed to receive the hospitalities proffered, for news had reached her from Italy that her brother Count Gamba was sick unto death. Before Lady Blessington had been made aware of this fact she wrote to Madame Guiccioli in October:—

'I shall grow superstitious, my dearest friend, for I really had a presentiment that you were either in sickness or in sorrow, and alas I find that you are in both. I wish I was near you, for I understand your heart as well as I do my own, and I think I could lighten your sufferings by sharing them. I have great faith

in the power of sympathy, and it is in moments of affliction that the presence of a true friend can be of use. I shall be more *triste* knowing that you are unhappy and alone, than if I was near you. Be assured that I feel for you a friendship as warm as it is sincere, and that few people can love you as well, because few people can appreciate you as I do.

'My carriage shall be at your door to-morrow at seven o'clock to bring you to dine with me: but if you wish to take the air, or have any visits to pay, it shall be at your service at any hour you like. Count D'Orsay charges me with *mille amitiés de sa part.* Adieu until to-morrow, *chère* and *belle amie.* God bless you prays your affectionate and devoted friend.'

A couple of weeks later brought news of Count Gamba's death, on which Lady Blessington wrote her the following letter:—

'Well can I share your feelings at the fatal event that has taken place. I too, lost a brother, dear to me as the life-blood that warms my heart, and though years, long years have passed since then, I remember the blow as if it only yesterday fell on me.

'When such an affliction befalls us, we are apt to forget that those we mourn have only preceded us to the tomb by at most a few years. We shall soon follow them and be united never more to part, and this thought should console us. Think how quickly passes even the longest life, and be comforted with the certainty of our reunion where there are

no more partings and no more tears. Heaven bless you my dearest friend.'

Soon after the melancholy news reached her, Madame Guiccioli in order to recruit her health and spirits went to stay with various friends in the country, whence she wrote stating she had been unwell. To this came a sympathetic reply from Lady Blessington who expressed her grief at hearing her friend had been so ill. 'I thought' she continues 'that your silence boded no good, but I tried to think it proceeded from the occupation and consequent fatigue of sight-seeing, which to a person with so much imagination, and so impressionable as you are, never fails to be as exhausting as it is exciting. How fortunate that you found a skilful doctor. I shall henceforth venerate his name and laud his practice, though I trust you will no more have occasion to try its efficacy.

'Your tour has been a very interesting one, and you had need of such an excitement to lessen the *tristesse* that had taken possession of you since the melancholy intelligence from Italy.

'There is but one source of consolation, my dear friend, under such afflictions, and I have been often during the last six years compelled to seek its aid, and this is the recollection that the friends torn from us by death (that ruthless destroyer of the dearest ties) only precede us at most by a few fleeting years, that only sure rendezvous where we shall all meet. Alas such is our weak-

ness that we mourn as if they only were condemned to die, and that we were not to follow them. The brevity of life proves the best consolation for the pains that fall to ourselves while in it. But why dwell on the subject to you, who like myself have tasted deeply of the cup of affliction and who are accustomed to its bitterness.

'I hope to see you soon again very soon after your arrival, with the roses of health again blooming on your cheeks. Count D'Orsay charges me with his kindest regards to you: we often think and talk of the pleasant hours passed in your society, when your charming voice and agreeable conversation gave wings to them.'

These were not the only letters of sympathy which Lady Blessington was called upon to write this year: for in June, Charles Mathews the elder returned from America in a dying condition, and before he could be removed to his own home in London, he laid down the burden of his life at Plymouth. His death came as a shock to Lady Blessington who at once wrote to express her grief to his widow. 'When one's feelings are understood' she remarks in the letter '—and who can understand yours like me, who have drunk the cup of bitterness to the very dregs—though sorrow is not removed it is lightened by being shared. Alas I have too keenly, too deeply felt the want of friends, to consider the rank or position of anyone who had served or loved me or mine, and there-

fore well can I understand all that you feel at the loss of the amiable, the noble-minded creature who has gone before us to that Kingdom where rank loses all its futile, its heartless distinctions, and we are judged of by our deeds and our hearts and not by our names. Though I have not been with you in person, my mind, my soul has been with you, and my tears have flowed in sympathy with yours.'

And a few days later she writes to Mrs Mathews saying she had before this sad news reached her, asked some people to dinner for Sunday, but she would be obliged to leave her sister and Count D'Orsay to entertain them. She suffered too much to attempt it. 'Indeed' she adds 'my spirits are as low as my health, and my thoughts are much more with you and your house of mourning than with anything passing around me. Conquer the feelings that the last sad event will excite, by recollecting what I had to bear when all I most valued was torn from me, and I left with strangers in a foreign land.'

At Christmas when memory most recalls the absent, Lady Blessington again wrote to Mrs Mathews: 'I can well enter into your feelings, every one of which finds an echo in my heart. Little do we think when we are enlivening birthdays and anniversaries, that we are laying up cause for future sorrow, and that a day may come when those who shared them with us, being snatched away, the return of past seasons of enjoyment bring only bitterness and sorrow.

'All that you feel, I felt and do feel, though years are gone by since the blow that destroyed my happiness took place. Without the constant occupation I have given myself, I should have sunk under it, when the memory of it comes back to me with all the bitterness of the past, though I try to chase it away.'

On the last day of December Landor writes to her from Bath to wish her many happy years. Then he goes on to speak of the annual of which she had sent him a copy.

'The *Book of Beauty* is under one hand, while, it requires no conjuror to tell you, I am writing this with the other. Since I had the pleasure of reading your last kind letter, I have been travelling about occasionally, and hoped to spend my Christmas at Clifton. There are some old thoughts resting upon Bath; but Bath is no longer what it was to anyone, and least of all to me. Clifton is the best climate on this side of Nice, and climate is everything to so Italianised a piece of machinery as I am. Poor Gell, I grieve that he is losing his spirits; they used to rise above his health, and now flag under it. The natural reflection is—he is only two years older than myself—but natural reflections are mostly selfish and often stupid ones. I would wish him to live on, were it only to keep me in countenance. Did you ever hear this rude phrase before? It was once said to me at dinner by Major D. I could not help replying that it was easier

to keep him in it, than put him out of it. Which made him ponder.'

One of the first letters she received in 1836 was written from Paris on January 5th, by Bulwer who says: 'I have been out little at present, though such of the world as I have encountered seem inclined to pet the lion if he will let them. But a gregarious lion, after all, would be but a sheep in disguise. Authors are made to be ascetics—and it is in vain to struggle, as I once did, against the common fate—made to go through the world sowing dreams to reap disappointments, to sacrifice grave interests to generous whims, to aspire to be better, and wiser, and tenderer, than others; though they may seem worse, and more visionary, and harsher, and so at last to shut up their souls in patient scorn, and find that even appreciation and justice come too late.'

The following month brought her a letter from Disraeli who was then anxious to become a member of the Carlton Club. In this he says:—

'MY DEAREST LADY,—Early in March there are to be fifty members elected into the Carlton by the members at large. A strong party of my friends, Lord L., Lord Chandos, Stuart de Rothesy etc., are very active in my behalf, and I think among the leaders of our party my claims would be recognised; but doubtless there is a sufficient alloy of dunces even among the Conservatives, and I have no doubt there will be a stout opposition

to me. Although I will not canvass myself, I wish my friends to do so *most earnestly*. I know from personal experience that one word from you would have more effect upon me than letters from all the lords in Xdom. I wish therefore to enlist you on my side, and will take the liberty of sending you a list to-morrow.'

As Lady Blessington's greatest pleasure was to serve her friends, there can be no doubt of the manner in which she responded to his appeal. Disraeli had the satisfaction of being elected, and on the 5th of March he writes to his sister gleefully: 'I carried the Carlton: the opposition was not inconsiderable in the committee, but my friends were firm—four hundred candidates and all in their own opinion with equal claims.'

In the spring of this year Lady Blessington left her residence in Seamore Place, the noise and bustle of that thoroughfare having become trying to her nerves, and took a house in Kensington Gore, then considered to be in the country, the purer air and quieter atmosphere of which she hoped would benefit her health that now suffered from the strain of constant work. The mansion she selected, known as Gore House, had once been the residence of William Wilberforce.

Lying back from the road, from which it was separated by high walls and great gates, it was approached by a courtyard that led to a spacious vestibule. The rooms were large and lofty, the hall wide and stately,

but the chiefest attraction of all were the beautiful gardens stretching at the back, with their wide terraces, flower-plots, extensive lawns and fine old trees. The house itself was fitted up with extraordinary splendour. The library, which became the favourite room of its owner, extended to the full length of the house from north to south, its southern windows looking on green pleasure grounds. Its walls were well-nigh lined with books, the edges of their shelves enamelled in ivory white, small interstices were filled with looking-glasses, which were also fitted into the panels of the doors; fireplaces of beautifully carved white marble stood at either end, and in the centre were delicate columns supporting an arch. The curtains were of silk damask of a delicate apple-green shade; the same material set in white and gold being seen in the chairs and lounges.

Here it was Lady Blessington generally received the friends, who now as ever flocked around her. And here she was enabled to add to the number of her pets; for her affection for animals was greater even than her love for flowers. As at Seamore Place, so at Gore House the visitor was generally met in the hall by an inquisitive poodle, a giant amongst his race, pure white in colour, with amber eyes. His sagacity was almost human, as a companion he was unequalled, and moreover his was the honour of having suggested to Landseer his picture of 'Laying Down the Law.' The poodle was French

but he had as companion an Italian greyhound, a beautiful animal whose portrait David Wilkie asked permission to paint. There was now added to the household a bird which much astonished the dogs and delighted the visitors, this being a wonderful talking crow who amongst other things was taught to say 'Up boys and at 'em:' a phrase which, with its head on one side it would deliver with a comic gravity that made the Duke of Wellington roar with laughter.

Then in the grounds were gold and silver pheasants that ate from their mistress's hand, an aviary for all kinds of birds, and a flock of pigeons that forever filled the air with their cooing.

This garden with its old walls of red brick across which stretched pear and fig trees, its masses of roses facing towards the south, its white and purple lilac trees close by the terrace, and its sheltered walks, afforded great delight to Lady Blessington, who, accompanied only by her dogs, would read, or plan her work here in summer time; or attended by her friends would pass pleasant hours talking over matters of common interest, dwelling upon the past, speculating regarding the far future, a subject fascinating to imaginations striving to penetrate the shadows, to picture the unknown, to sight what endless ages may hold for the soul.

In a letter which Barry Cornwall wrote congratulating her on a change of residence, he tells her she may safely enjoy her garden.

For, says he 'Nature is a friend that never deceives us. You may depend upon it that her roses will be genuine, and that the whisper of your trees will contain neither flattery nor slander.'

When quite settled at Gore House, Lady Blessington wrote to Landor that 'she had taken up her residence in the country, being a mile from London.' She hears he is coming to town in the following month and hopes he will stay with her. 'I have a comfortable room to offer you and what is better still a cordial welcome. Pray bear this in mind and let me have the pleasure of having you under my roof.

'Have you heard of the death of poor Sir William Gell?' she asks, and then after giving some particulars of his demise she continues 'If we were only half as lenient to the living as we are to the dead, how much happiness might we render them, and from how much vain and bitter remorse might we be spared, when the grave, the all-atoning grave has closed over them.'

To this letter written on the 10th of March, he at once replies saying she cannot doubt how happy and proud he will be to become her guest. 'If' he says 'you should not have left London in the beginning of May, do not be shocked at hearing that a cab is come to your door with a fierce-looking old man in it.'

In due time he arrived at Gore House much to the delight of his hostess; but before he became her guest he wrote that he would

not let any of her court stand in his way; that when he was tired of them, he would leave them: yet, as John Forster his biographer narrates, 'Being there he enjoyed himself to the full; indeed for him there was no pleasanter, more congenial house in London, none where he had a warmer welcome, where he was freer from constraint.' And this statement is borne out by Landor's correspondence. 'Where else' he says on one occasion in speaking of Gore House 'where else can I find so much wit, so much wisdom? The rest of the world may pretend it can collect (but I doubt it) as much beauty. Do not whisper a word of this to a certain pair of sisters.'

In a letter written in reply to his expressions of gratitude for her hospitality, Lady Blessington tells him he must come and pay her another visit when he returns from his relations: for nowhere could he bestow his society where it could be more highly valued; and for that reason he ought to be more liberal of the gift. She thought of him often and missed him often. It was happily said that friends like lovers, should be very near or very distant. That was what she felt, for one got reconciled to the absenced caused by a great distance, and impatient at that which a short distance produced. 'When you were in Italy I knew it was useless to hope to see you; but at Bristol I reproach you for not giving me more of your society.'

In August 1836, Landor writes to ask her if she has ever read the poems of Miss Barrett

who afterwards became Mrs Browning. If you have, I doubt whether you will be inclined to think the frame of her mind at all adapted to the *Book of Beauty*. Latterly, I hear, she is become quite absorbed in her devotional contemplations. I never saw her but once. It was at my friend Kenyon's, and I conversed with her only for about ten minutes. Hearing that she was an excellent Greek scholar, I gave her a few Greek verses, which I happened to recollect at the moment, and which I think were among the last I had written. However, I will not delay my inquiries of Kenyon whether she will compose something, or whether she has anything already composed which may be inserted in the *Book of Beauty*.

'I will also ask Richard Milnes.'

Two months later he tells her: 'I arrived here in such utter disarray, and so vilely out of spirits, in the dark, that I could not in my conscience present myself at Gore House. God grant that nothing may remain of your indisposition. Early to-morrow morning I must go to Clifton, where I have been expected these last four days. Sadness ought never to be where you are, and yet I must have brought it. I returned quite alone—the cholera is the plea why none of my children were allowed to meet me in Tyrol. To-morrow I shall roll myself up like a hedgehog for six months. I am most anxious to hear that you are quite well again. Pray tell me how Mrs Fairlie's book goes on, and say something of her sweet little girl. This

melancholy weather would certainly make me throw myself into the Thames, if I were to remain near it; and yet the throw is an idle one, for the air itself is a Thames.'

A fortnight later he sends her the following:—

'DEAR LADY BLESSINGTON,—In my hasty transit thro' London, I wrote your Ladyship a few lines, apologizing for not paying my respects. With disappointment, fatigue, illness, and pestilential fog, I was half dead. I reached the hotel in Vise Street at nearly six, dined, went to bed at nine, rose at eight, and reached this place about the same hour in the evening. Yesterday I had a letter from Saunders and Otley, to whom I had sent another volume for publication. They decline it, telling me that they are losers of 150 by the *Pericles*. A young author would be vexed. I wrote them by this post as follows: "*Gentlemen, you judge very rightly in supposing that nothing of mine can be popular. I regret that for the present you are subject to a considerable loss by the* Pericles. *I never can allow anyone to be a loser by me, on which principle (if on no other) I would never play a game at cards. Perhaps a few more copies, though probably very few, may be sold within another year. At all events, at the end of the next, I will make good your loss. I am also in your debt for the* Letters of a Conservative, *which have lately been reviewed in Germany by Dr Paulus. But in England they do not appear to be worth the notice of the learned world, or the political. Be pleased to let me know what*

I am in your debt for the publication and the books you sent me, that I may discharge this portion of it immediately."

'I now rejoice that I reserved for my own expenditure only 200 a year, and that I have not deprived my wife of her horses, nor my sons of theirs, nor of anything else they had been used to. I never feel great pleasure in doing what anybody else can do. It would puzzle a good many to save 50 out of 200 in one year. The rest must come out of my estate, which I am clearing of its encumbrances very fast. I hear that if I had not formerly placed it in the hands of the vilest rascal in Wales, one Gabb, it would, even in these bad times, with 35 per cent. deducted, have brought me a clear income of £4000. In that case, what pleasure could I possibly have had in writing my letter to MM. Saunders and Otley.

'But I am losing sight of my object. It was to place this publication and my *Interview of Petrarca and Boccaccio* (which I will send when I have transcribed it) wholly at your Ladyship's disposal. If there is anything passable in either, do what you please with it, and burn the rest.'

The Mrs Fairlie to whom Landor refers was the eldest daughter of Mrs Purves, and the favourite niece of Lady Blessington. Quite early in life Louisa Purves had married a man of good family but of limited means, named John Fairlie of Chevely Park. In order to add to her income, she utilised the

considerable literary talent she possessed, to contribute to the *Book of Beauty* and later to edit an annual called *Children of the Nobility*. Her eldest child Isabella, though wonderfully intelligent, was born deaf and dumb, an affliction which endeared her the more to the heart of her grand-aunt from whom she was seldom separated. Mrs Fairlie was extremely delicate, and her sense of religion was so vivid as to continually prompt her to admonish and instruct all around her, including her aunt, whose worldliness she deplored.

Three years before this date, Lady Blessington had made the acquaintance of Captain Marryat, a blunt, hearty-mannered man, who savoured of the roughness and strength of the sea. In 1829 he had written the *Naval Officer* for which he received four hundred pounds, and the following year he retired from the service and published *The King's Own*. Two years later he produced *Newton Forster*, and became editor of the *Metropolitan Magazine*, a post he retained for three years, during which time he gave the world *Peter Simple*, *Jacob Faithful* and *The Pacha of Many Tales*.

Taking his family with him he went to reside abroad, in 1835, and in the summer of the following year he wrote from Spa to tell Lady Blessington that he had received her packet of letters for which he is much obliged, not for the letters alone but also for thinking of him when he was so far out of the way, which was very unusual in this world and

particularly flattering to him. Spa was a very beautiful place, very cheap, but it was deserted. There were only two or three English families there, but they were all *cocktails*, as sporting men would say.

'We are therefore quite alone which pleases me. I was tired of bustle, and noise, and excitement, and here there is room for meditation e'en to madness, as Calista says, although I do not intend to carry my thoughts quite so far. I write very little; just enough to amuse me, and make memorandums, and think. In the morning I learn German, which I have resolved to conquer, although at forty one's memory is not quite so amenable as it ought to be. At all events I have no master, so if the time is thrown away, the money will be saved.'

He believes she sometimes looked at the *Metropolitan;* if so she would see he had begun his *Diary of a Blaze* in its pages: at home they thought it very good light magazine stuff, and liked it. 'I mean however that it shall not all be *quite nonsense.* I hope the *Book of Beauty* goes on well. I know that you, and Mrs Norton, and I are the three looked up to, to provide for the public taste.

'I never thought that I should feel a pleasure in idleness; but I do now. I had done too much and I required repose, or *rather repose to some portions of my brain.* I am idle here to my heart's content, and each day is but the precursor of its second.

I am like a horse which has been worked too hard, turned out to grass, and I hope I shall come out again as fresh as a two-year-old. I walk about and pick early flowers with the children, sit on a bench in the beautiful *allées vertes* which we have here, smoke my cigar, and meditate till long after the moon is in the zenith. Then I lie on the sofa and read French novels, or I gossip with anyone I can pick up in the streets. Besides which I wear out my old clothes: and there is a great pleasure in having a coat on which gives you no anxiety. I expect that by October I shall be all right again.

'I am afraid this will be a very uninteresting letter; but what can you expect from one who is living the life of a hermit, and who never even takes the trouble to wind up his watch; who takes no heed of time, and feels an interest in the price of strawberries and green peas, because the children are very fond of them. I believe that this is the first epoch of real quiet that I have had in my stormy life, and every day I feel more and more inclined to dream away my existence.

'Farewell my dear Lady Blessington; present my best wishes to the Count D'Orsay *beau et brave.* Once more with thanks adieu.'

In this year Bulwer obtained a legal separation from his wife; nervous irritability and consequent quarrels having already parted them. Still working at high pressure, on his return from Italy in 1834 he had written the *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and published *Rienzi*

the following year. In the early autumn at Macready's suggestion he wrote a play called The Duchess de la Valliere, which was produced in the first month of the coming year. Meanwhile he was seeking quiet and rest in the country, from where he writes to his old friend, in a letter dated September 17th: 'Here I am rusticating calmly amongst the apples of Devonshire. I made an agreeable and prolonged tour through Hampshire by the New Forest; and skirting the Devonshire coast, arrived safely at my present abode, some few miles from the sea.

'My avocations are as simple as my history. I *literatize* away the morning, ride at three, go to bathe at five, dine at six, and get through the evening as best I may, sometimes by correcting a proof.

'What villainous weather—wind and rain—rain and wind—I suspect that rain and wind are to an English heaven what beefsteaks and mutton chops are to an English inn. They profess to have everything else, but you are sure to have the steak to-day and the chop to-morrow. I have had only one glimpse of the sun since I have been here, and it was then so large that I took it for half a sovereign, which I had lost the day before. . . .

'Pray write and tell me all your news. I long to have a breeze from the Isle of Beauty, and when I receive your letter shall fancy it summer. Long after youth leaves one for good, it comes back for a flying visit, in every recollection of friendship, in every association of grace.'

Before this year ended a notable figure was added to Lady Blessington's circle in the person of Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte; son of Louis Napoleon King of Holland and of Hortense daughter of the Empress Josephine by her first marriage. By the death of the great Napoleon's son, the Duc de Reichstadt in 1832, Prince Louis became in the opinion of himself and his followers, heir to the throne of France, his attempt on which in 1836, caused him to be banished to the United States from whence he set sail for England and took up his residence in London, there to await another opportunity of asserting his claim.

As already stated Lady Blessington had met the ex-Queen of Holland at Rome, and received from her a superb sapphire ring set with diamonds. The friendship established by Lady Blessington with his mother, had paved the way for his reception at Gore House where he was graciously welcomed, and had the opportunity of meeting some of the highest ministers of state whose good will, it was presumed, might prove serviceable to him when he occupied a position of which he then only dreamt.

Heavy-lidded, pallid-faced, reticent, he was observant and thoughtful; and though not a brilliant member of Lady Blessington's circle, he was one who caused much interest as a refugee, as one who adventured, and before whom possibilities lay; as a man moreover who exercised a strange magnetic influence

over all who approached him, which they found impossible to resist.

It was in 1836 that Lady Blessington became acquainted with John Forster, who was soon to become one of her warmest friends. At this time he was a man of four-and-twenty, whose abilities were already recognised; for from 1832 he had been writing for the *Courier* and the *Athenæum*, and in 1833 had been appointed as dramatic and literary critic to the *Examiner*.

CHAPTER VI

Failing Health—Providing for Others—John Varley, Artist and Mystic—The Science of the Stars—Bulwer's Interest in Mysticism—William Blake—The Ghost of a Flea—Lady Blessington's Crystal—Letters from Disraeli—William Archer Shee's Impressions of Madame Guiccioli—Letters from Lady Blessington, Bulwer, and Landor—Brilliant Reception at Gore House—D'Orsay and His Debts—Letter from Prince Louis Napoleon.

STILL urged to work by demands for money which daily became more pressing, Lady Blessington published a new novel entitled *The Confessions of an Elderly Gentleman*, early in 1837. The strain which incessant work entailed upon her, injured her health; and she suffered from neuralgia, from weakened nerves, and general prostration. Then her time being so fully occupied she was unable to take much exercise and therefore grew stout, an unbecoming condition which she much deplored.

In a letter written on the 19th of April in this year she tells Landor:—

'I have been indeed very unwell of late, but am now thank God considerably better.

The truth is, the numerous family of father, mother, sister, brother and his six children that I have to provide for, compels me to write when my health would demand a total repose from literary exertion, and this throws me back.

'*Mais que faire?* A thousand thanks for your most kind offer of literary assistance, and for the charming scene from "Orestes" which is full of power. How glad I shall be to see you again at Gore House. Do pray pay me a visit, whenever you can make up your mind to move: for be assured no one can more truly enjoy or value your society than I do. I ordered my publishers to send you one of the first copies of my new novel, which I hope has reached you. The story is only a vehicle to convey a severe censure on the ultra fashionables of London, and the book has been very indulgently received.

'Mrs Fairlie and her family are still with me, and Bella improves daily in intelligence and beauty. We often speak of you and wish you were with us.'

But whatever anxieties troubled her mind, whatever physical ailment attacked her, she strove to conceal them from her friends, whom she invariably received with her characteristic graciousness; her manner leading them to believe it was they, not she, who created the pleasure of the hour.

It was at this time a striking and singular figure might be seen in her drawing-room. This was none other than John Varley one

of the founders of the Society of Painters in Water-colours, an artist, a mystic, an astrologer. A man of great stature, his face was rugged and earnest, his eyes had the sadness of the seers. Lady Blessington was sufficiently broad-minded to feel interested in all theories, philosophies, and sciences, and rather than deny the possibility of facts that were outside her own experience, or repudiate statements that seemed incredible and erroneous, she preferred to hear them discussed and explained: deferring her judgment until knowledge had been obtained.

Seated beside her chair of state at the end of the long library where she nightly received her friends, John Varley, the wise man of her court discoursed to the eager circle around, on the ancient science by which man's fate was read by the stars, according to the constellations occupied by the planets, and their position to each other at the moment of his birth. Many instances was he ready to give regarding the marvels of this science, practised by the wisest race the world has known, thousands of years before the birth of Christ.

In particular he would tell how one morning he had seen that before midday something serious would happen to himself or to his property, but to which he could not say because the nature of the afflicting planet, the newly-discovered Herschel was not well known. At all events he had an important engagement for that day, but would not stir out, lest he might be run over or meet with some other

accident. A few minutes before twelve his son found him walking up and down his studio, he being unable to settle at his work, Varley said to his son 'I am feeling all right, I don't think anything is going to happen to me personally; it must be my property which is threatened.' And scarce had he spoken when a cry of fire was heard outside; for fire had broken out in his house which was not insured and by which he lost everything he had in the world.

He would bring witnesses to prove he had foretold many important facts, amongst them the date on which William Collins died. James Ward his friend and brother artist, for whose children Varley had cast their horoscopes, burned these hieroglyphics, because their predictions falling out so truly, he was convinced that Varley held commerce with the devil. Nay he would occasionally single some stranger out of the circle around him, the day and hour of whose birth he would demand, and there and then with a pencil on the fly-leaf of a letter, would draw a horoscope from which he stated facts concerning the individual's past, and make predictions regarding the future.

None listened to him more attentively than Bulwer, to whose mind all things mystic presented a vivid fascination, and it was from Varley, the novelist took lessons in astrology, as did at a later date young Richard Burton whose strange career and Oriental travels were foreshadowed by the artist.

Then Varley would tell of his friend the mystical artist, William Blake, who died in 1827. The Philistine had regarded as mad this man whose amazing genius had produced poems that held the key to spiritual knowledge, and drawn pictures that are amongst the most wonderful the world has seen. Varley would gravely narrate how, at his suggestion, Blake would summon to his presence such persons as David, Moses, Mark Anthony, or Julius Cæsar, whose portraits he would proceed to draw, looking up from his paper from time to time with straining eyes towards presences invisible to all but himself; waiting now and then whilst they moved or frowned, and leaving off abruptly when they suddenly retired. Blake in this way executed some fifty of such pencil drawings for Varley, the most curious of which was The Ghost of a Flea, as he called the strange human figure he depicted.

'As I was anxious to make the most correct investigation in my power of the truth of these visions' Varley would tell Lady Blessington and her friends 'on hearing of the spiritual apparition of a flea, I asked him if he could draw for me the resemblance of what he saw. He instantly said "I see him now before me." I therefore gave him paper and a pencil with which he drew the portrait. I felt convinced by his mode of proceeding, that he had a real image before him; for he left off, and began on another part of the paper to make a separate drawing of the mouth of the flea, which the

spirit having opened, he was prevented from proceeding with the first sketch till he had closed it. During the time occupied in completing the drawing, the flea told him that all fleas were inhabited by the souls of such men as were by nature blood-thirsty to excess; and were therefore providentially confined to the size and forms of insects; otherwise, were he himself for instance, the size of a horse, he would depopulate a great portion of the country.'

One evening when the conversation turned on various forms of divination, Bulwer asked Lady Blessington to show them the magic crystal which had been given her by Namiz Pacha, in whose family it had been in use for over six hundred years before Christ; various generations having regulated their lives according to the symbolic visions seen therein. The crystal was four inches in diameter and had been consecrated to the sun. It was only to be consulted during four hours in the day, when to those specially gifted with clairvoyance, visions appeared in its clear depths. Lady Blessington valued it highly because of its history, but from the hour of its first arrival, when under the direction of Namiz Pacha she had stared into the crystal and believed herself to have seen a sight that startled and saddened her, she could never be induced to look into it again.

Disraeli was scarcely less interested in such subjects than Bulwer, who at a later date, drew for the former a geomantic figure from which

he predicted that which befell him, as the second Lord Lytton has stated in the biography of his father.

In the spring of the year Disraeli was a guest at Gore House, where he corrected the proofs of his novel *Venetia*. On returning to his father's home he wrote to his hostess as follows :—

'MY DEAR LADY,—Although it is little more than a fortnight since I quitted your truly friendly and hospitable roof, both of which I shall always remember with deep and lively gratitude, it seems to me at least a far more awful interval of time. I have waited for a serene hour to tell you of my doings; but serene hours are rare, & therefore I will not be deluded into waiting any longer.

'In spite of every obstacle in the shape of harassed feelings & other disagreeable accidents of life, I have not forgotten the fair *Venetia*, who has grown under my paternal care, & as much in grace, I hope, as in stature, or rather dimensions. She is truly like her prototype—

"——the child of love,
Tho' born in bitterness & nurtured in convulsion;"

but I hope she will prove a source of consolation to her parent, & also to her godmother, for I consider you to stand in that relation to her. I do not think that you will find any golden hint of our musing strolls has been thrown away upon me; & I should not be

surprised if, in six weeks, she may ring the bell at your hall door, & request admittance, where I know she will find at least one sympathising friend.

'I have, of course, no news from this extreme solitude. My father advances valiantly with his great enterprise, but works of that calibre are hewn out of the granite with slow & elaborate strokes. Mine are but plaster-of-Paris casts, or rather statues of snow that melt as soon as they are fashioned.

'D'Orsay has written me kind letters, which always inspirit me. How are my friends, if I have any? At any rate, how is Bulwer? I can scarcely expect you to find time to write to me, but I need not say what pleasure your handwriting w^d^ afford me, not merely in pencil notes in a chance volume. This is all very stupid, but I co^d^ not be quite silent. Ever your DIS.'

Months later he writes her another letter in which he says:—

'I see by the papers that you have quitted the shores of the "far-resounding sea," & resumed your place in the most charming of modern houses. I therefore venture to recall my existence to your memory, & request the favour of hearing some intelligence of yourself, which must always interest me. Have you been well, happy, & prosperous? And has that pen, plucked assuredly from the pinion of a bird of Paradise, been idle or creative? My lot has been as usual here, tho' enlivened by the presence of Lady

Sykes, who has contrived to pay us two visits, & the presence of Lord Lyndhurst, who also gave us a fortnight of his delightful society. I am tolerably busy, & hope to give a good account of myself & doings when we meet, which I trust will be soon. How goes that "great lubber," the Public, & how fares that mighty hoax, the World? Who of our friends has distinguished or extinguished himself or herself? In short, as the hart for the waterside, I pant for a little news, but chiefly of your fair & agreeable self. The *Book of Beauty* will soon, I fancy, charm the public with its presence. Where have you been? In Hampshire I heard from Lord L. How is the most delightful of men & best of friends, the Admirable Crichton? I don't mean Willis who I see has married, a fortune I suppose, tho' it doth not sound like one. How & where is Bulwer? How are the Whigs and how do they feel? All here who know you send kind greetings, & all who have not that delight, kind wishes. Peace be within your walls & plenteousness within your palace. Vale. Your affectionately.'

Another visitor who stayed at Gore House at this time was the Countess Guiccioli. William Archer Shee, brother to the President of the Royal Academy who met her at one of Lady Blessington's receptions on May 1837, describes her as having 'neither youth, striking beauty, nor grace, and it is difficult to believe she ever could have been the great poet's ideal. She is not tall and is thick set, devoid of air or style,

and whatever she may have been is no longer attractive. Her manners too are neither high-bred nor gracious, and altogether her appearance and bearing are most *désenchantant.* She sang several Italian airs to her own accompaniment in a very pretentious manner, and her voice is loud and somewhat harsh. In fact when you look at her it is not difficult to believe the story which Jekyll tells of her that she sat down to sing at some great house in London, and after preluding with much pretension, and when all around were on the tiptoe of expectation, she suddenly stopped, put her hands behind her in a convulsive effort to lessen some unseen but apparently not unfelt pressure in the region of the waist and exclaim with a laugh "*Dio buono, Io troppo mangiato*—Good God, I've eaten too much."

'Last night,' he adds 'she was seen at a disadvantage, as our hostess and her sister Madame San Marseault, were both radiant, and their brilliant toilettes cast into the shade the somewhat dowdy costume of the Countess. The fact is that Lady Blessington is conspicuous for her dress, which is always in excellent taste; it is always adapted to set off the attractions and soften the exuberance of a figure where the only defect is the embonpoint, the effect of which however she knows how to mitigate with much skill.'

When Madame Guiccioli had returned to Italy from visiting Gore House, Lady Blessington assures her it appeared a long, long time since she had left, since when the writer

had anxiously looked for the assurance that her friend had got through her voyage and journey safely, and with as little inconvenience as might be hoped. 'I have missed you continually and thought of you often' Lady Blessington continues. 'You are so warm-hearted and affectionate, that were you less amiable by many degrees than you are, it would be very difficult after having enjoyed your society for a few weeks to resign it without deep regret. But I console myself with the hope that you will come to me next year again, when we shall renew our sober conversations by the fireside, like two philosophers who have acquired wisdom by the only true road to that science—suffering.

'You ask me about my health, but alas I can give you no satisfactory account of it. I went to Margate the Tuesday after you left me, and remained there eight days, when finding the sea air too cold for me I returned home, and though not better in health, find it less irksome to be ill at home than at an inn. I send you the ring engraved. It has your cypher in the centre, and a Marguerite and a *pensée* on the sides to remind you of one who thinks often and affectionately of you.'

Lady Blessington had been induced to try the air of Margate by Bulwer, who was staying there in September 1837, in which month he wrote to her:—

'People walk about here in white shoes and enjoy themselves as much as if they were not Englishmen. I lodge over a library, and hear

a harp nightly, by which the fashionable world is summoned to raffle for card-racks and work-boxes. It commences at nine and twangs on till eleven: at twelve I am in the arms of Morpheus.

'An innocent life enough, very odd that one should enjoy it, *mais tous les goûts sont respectables.* Though Margate itself be not exactly the region for you to illumine, I cannot help thinking that some grand solitary villa on this cheerful coast would brace and invigorate you. The air is so fine, the sands so smooth, and there is so much variety in the little island.

'How is *le beau Roi* Alfred? I can fancy him on the Margate pier, with the gaze of the admiring crowd fixed upon him. But he would be nothing without white shoes. I am now going to stroll along the sands, and teaze shrimps which abound in little streamlets, and are singularly playful considering that they are born to be boiled.'

A couple of weeks later, writing from the same place, he says 'I have been whiling away the time here, with nothing much better than the mere enjoyment of a smooth sea and fair sky, which a little remind me of my beloved Naples. Margate and Naples—what association. After all a very little could suffice to make us happy, were it not for our own desires to be happier still. If we could but reduce ourselves to mechanism, we could be contented. Certainly I think as we grow older, we grow more cheerful, externals please us more, and were it not for those

dead passions which we call memories, and which have ghosts no exorcism can lay, we might walk on soberly to the future, and dispense with excitement by the way. If we cannot stop time, it is something to shoe him with felt, and prevent his steps from creaking.'

Throughout the winter Lady Blessington continued ailing, and would gladly have laid aside her work had such been possible, but every day seemed to increase the necessity for labour.

In January 1838 she writes to a correspondent that her silence, for which she begs to be excused, has not proceeded from want of regard 'but has been compelled by the pressure of literary labour joined to a delicacy of health that still renders me a sad invalid.'

In the following month her old friend Landor writes to tell her they have a bright and beautiful sun that morning, which makes him imagine he sees her in her 'enchanted garden feeding a young pheasant or teaching a young flower to look gracefully before you bring her out and present her in the drawing-room.

'Here in Bath I am leading a quiet and therefore pleasant life. My occupation has been the correction of my *Imaginary Conversations*, or rather the insertion of certain links in them. If you have any friends who are readers and not rich, and if you think my *Pentameron* will please them you have only to show this to MM. Saunders and Otley, and they will give you as many copies as you want. So certain was I that it never

could gratify the public, that my first idea was to order the printing of but one hundred copies. I broke this determination, but I kept the other, which was to prohibit the announcement of the publication in any way whatever. When I return to it after a year or two, with a fresh eye, perhaps I may discover things to mend or omit. At present I have looked for them and cannot find them. The revisal of my *Imaginary Conversations* has cost me more time than the composition. For this, after all, is my great work; the others are boudoir-tables to lay it on—tables with very slender legs, though fancifully inlaid and pretty well polished.'

A week later on the 18th of February he writes to acknowledge the receipt of her novel just published *The Confessions of an Elderly Lady*, 'and of all who heard confessions, I think nobody, shorn or unshorn, was more attentive or more delighted' he tells her; and then continues 'As my reading in future will be chiefly, if not only, novels, I hope you will insure me at least one of the best, the few years I shall be able to enjoy anything. Your scenes and characters are real, your reflections profound, and admirably expressed. I could not but remark some of the more delicate and recondite with my pencil, though so beautiful a book ought scarcely to be treated with so daring a liberty. When you do me the favour of writing to me again, pray give me Forster's address, for I want to send him the corrected addition of my *Imaginary Conversations*.'

It is about this time he thinks of having his *Conversations* illustrated, as such might render a volume more saleable, not that he cares a fig either for popularity or profit; 'for' says he 'if ever I am popular I shall never know anything about it: and if ever I get money I shall neither spend nor save it. I have already more than I want. But I really should like to be able to make a pretty present of such a volume as no other man living can write, embellished with worthy engravings.' Later he tells her a significant fact 'Last week I sent Saunders and Otley a hundred and forty pounds as a fine for committing the folly of authorship. Next year I shall pay them eighty more.' And later still comes this bitter confidence 'I heard from Florence not long ago, but nothing from that quarter is likely to give me pleasure or composure. I wish I could utterly forget all connected with it. But the waves of oblivion dash against my Tuscan terraces, and the spray reaches my family, and blinds the eyes that should be turned towards me, for other waters fill my heart with bitterness. I am, dear Lady, ever your Ladyship's very obliged servt.' Then she writes to tell him she contemplates publishing a journal she kept whilst abroad. This will for a while save the strain of imagination which novel writing required and the book she hoped would bring her money. She intended to call it *The Idler in Italy*. Might she mention her meeting with him in its pages? In

reply Landor wrote—'I hope you received my answer to your last kind letter. I sent it enclosed in a parcel addressed to Forster. It contained nothing but my sense of gratitude for the honor your Ladyship has done me in recollecting me so far back as Italy, and the reason why I was silent when you announced it a little while before. I am always too proud when I am mentioned by you, and take a mischievous delight in seeing what a number of enemies a voice of praise always brings out against me. Boys have much the same feeling when they see curs exasperated, knowing as they ride along that the said curs cannot reach their stirrup leathers. If they could, the laughter might be somewhat in a lower key.'

Before the year 1838 was out she had published her novel called *The Governess*, on which she had been at work for some time. Landor considered it the most admirable of all her books, the one which most delighted him. 'It has left' he tells her 'a deep impression on my memory. *The Governess* is more than a match for *The Elderly Gentleman*. She brought tears into the eyes of another who is somewhat of that description —*par-troppo* an Italian young lady would say.'

In return she writes to Landor regarding lines addressed by him to his son Arnold then in his twentieth year, which had appeared in the *Examiner*. 'If he read them' says Lady Blessington 'how can he resist flying to you?' and then she continues 'Alas half our pains

through life arise from being misunderstood, and men of genius above all others, are the most subject to this misfortune; for a misfortune and a serious one I call it, when those near and dear to us mistake us, and erect between their hearts and ours, barriers that even love cannot break down, though pride humbles itself to assist the endeavour.'

It was in October she wrote these words to Landor, and in the same month she tells John Forster 'she has been a sad invalid of late and is making but slow progress towards health. My literary labours, slight as the subjects to which they have been directed are, have fatigued me and I now discern *light* works may prove as *heavy* to the writer as they too frequently do to the reader.'

Still with a smiling face she continued to receive the friends who gathered round her, most of them unaware of the struggle for health and money which she endured.

In May 1839, William Archer Shee again describes an 'unusually brilliant' reception at Gore House, whose hostess he adds, has the art of collecting around her all that is best worth knowing in the male society of London. Cabinet ministers, poets, painters and politicians were all assembled in her beautiful rooms. 'One would think' he writes 'that such varied ingredients would not amalgamate well, but would counteract or neutralise each other, rather than form a mixture to the taste of all; but such is not the case. Under the judicious and graceful presidency of the

attractive hostess, the society that meets in her *salons* has a charm that few reunions of the most learned or the most witty can offer.

'She has the peculiar and most unusual talent of keeping the conversation in a numerous circle general, and of preventing her guests from dividing into little selfish *pelotons*. With a tact unsurpassed she contrives to draw out even the most modest tyro from his shell of reserve, and by appearing to take an interest in his opinion gives him the courage to express it: all her visitors seem by some hidden influence to find their level, yet they leave her house satisfied with themselves. While drawing them out and affording to each of them an opportunity for riding within moderation his own particular hobby, she seizes the right moment for diverting the conversation into a channel that will give somebody else a chance. The popular M.P. is made to feel that there are other interests waiting to be discussed besides those connected with politics and party; the garrulous leader of his circuit awakes to the conviction that he cannot here, as is his wont at the dinner-table, hold forth to the exclusion of every voice but his own; and the shallow man of fashion sees the rising painter or the budding poet deferred to on matters with which he is little conversant. In fact the bore, the coxcomb, and the cynic have each to confine himself within the limits of good taste and good breeding; and though Hayward still continues to talk more than

anyone else, though Warran displays the overweening vanity that has marred his social as well as his forensic success, and though Rogers is allowed to sneer at his dearest friends, still the society has a wonderful charm for those who like myself go more to listen than to talk.

'Among the company last night was Prince Louis Napoleon. He was quiet, silent, and inoffensive, as to do him justice he generally is, but he does not impress one with the idea that he has inherited his uncle's talents any more than his fortunes. He went away before the circle quite broke up leaving like Sir Peter Teazle "his character behind him," and the few remaining did not spare him, but discussed him in a tone that was far from flattering. D'Orsay however who came in later with Lord Pembroke, stood up manfully for his friend, which was pleasant to see.'

Disraeli who was one of the company on this occasion, was now about to take the most important step in his life. Mr Wyndham Lewis a man of great wealth and a member for Maidstone; died suddenly on March 1838; leaving his wife a magnificent house at Grosvenor Gate and a handsome income. The circle of their friends was wide, and innumerable messages and letters of sympathy poured in upon the widow, none of which was so remarkable as that written by Mrs Bulwer. On her marriage her husband had given her a little Blenheim dog that became such a favourite with his mistress that she seldom

allowed it out of her sight. She had named it Fairy and had tiny visiting cards printed for the pet, which were left on friends and neighbours when she called on them. The dog died about the same time as Wyndham Lewis to whose wife Mrs Bulwer wrote a letter of condolence, in which as her son narrates, she compared 'their respective losses, lamenting her own as being in the nature of things the heaviest and most irreparable of the two.'

Mrs Wyndham Lewis was some fifteen years the senior of Disraeli and had never been a beauty; but she was a woman of great intelligence, sound judgment, and wide sympathy. He was deeply in debt and she could give him the independence for which he had ever longed, so that he married her in August 1839, seventeen months after her husband's death, she being then fifty. Before this event took place Disraeli wrote to Lady Blessington to thank her for her new book, *Desultory Thoughts and Reflections*, which he says he gave Mrs Wyndham Lewis who is a great admirer of aphoristic writing. She was, he continues 'to mark what she had approved' and the volume is in consequence lying on her table with scarcely a margin not deeply scored. I should have written to thank you for this agreeable recollection of me, but have intended every day to do so in person.

'It is indeed a long time since we met, but I flatter and console myself that we shall meet very soon and very often. But in truth

with a gouty parent and impending matrimony, the House of Commons and the mechanical duties of Society, the last two months have been terribly monopolised: but I can assure you that a day seldom passes, that I do not think or speak of you, and I hope I shall always be allowed by you to count the Lady of Gore House among my dearest and most valued friends. D'Orsay was charming yesterday.'

In a letter written a few weeks after his marriage and before going abroad with his wife, Disraeli states that he and the latter had returned from Bradenham. 'I remember' he says 'your kind wish that we should meet before our departure, and if not inconvenient to you I would propose calling at Gore House to-morrow with my dear Mary Anne who, I am sure, will be delighted by finding herself under a roof that has proved to me at all times so hospitable and devoted. I hope that his engagements will not prevent our meeting our friend Alfred, for I hardly suppose we shall have another opportunity of being together for some time. I should think about three would not be unsuitable to you.'

Meanwhile Count D'Orsay continued to surprise the town by the extravagance and novelty of his dress, and to fascinate his friends by his easy good nature, his brilliancy, his desire to please, which is the great secret of social success. 'We send back our dearest D'Orsay' Disraeli wrote to Lady Blessington when the Count had been staying

with him at Bradenham 'with some of the booty of yesterday's sport as our homage to you. His visit has been very short but very charming, and everybody here loves him as much as you and I do.'

On Lady Blessington leaving Seamore Place, D'Orsay had given up his house in Curzon Street and taken another at Kensington Gore, not far from her residence. Notwithstanding the fortune he had gained with his wife, he had even before leaving Paris been involved in debt; and after a few years spent in London, his inability to understand the value of money, and his gambling losses made him a debtor to a still greater amount. For a long while the tradesmen with whom he dealt refrained from sending him their bills, lest he might withdraw his patronage which secured them the custom of those who would vie with or imitate him. It was said that his tailors on sending home his clothes were wont to slip some bank-notes into the pockets, and that on one occasion when this practice was omitted, D'Orsay returned the garments to their maker saying he had forgotten to line the pockets. This story may be as untrue as the statement made by a Parisian paper, *Le Globe*, to the effect that every day he gave a guinea to a beggar who handed him a light for his cigar.

An anecdote which has the merit of being veracious in detail and characteristic of the man, states that having met Major Crauford, with whom he was well acquainted, D'Orsay

learned from him he was about to sell his commission in order to pay his debts. Such a proceeding seemed extraordinary to the Count who begged of him to alter his determination, but the officer replied he must either lose his honour or sell his commission, for no alternative was left.

'Lend me ten pounds' said D'Orsay, who could not see why he should not have some of the money about to be wasted in payments. The Major disliked to comply with this request, which however he found it impossible to refuse. Having obtained the sum D'Orsay parted from him light-heartedly, after his fashion: but early next morning he called on the Major and coolly began to empty his pockets of gold and bank notes until he had counted out the sum of seven hundred and fifty pounds which he told Crauford was his. The bewildered Major thought his visitor had gone mad, but D'Orsay merely laughed at his surprise. 'I staked your ten pounds at Crockfords' he said 'and won this sum, which is justly yours; for if I had lost, you never would have got back the money you lent me.'

Though D'Orsay and his wife had parted in 1834, owing to delays in the Court of Chancery it was not until six years later that a legal separation was drawn up.

In accordance with the terms of this, Count D'Orsay renounced all his interests in the Blessington estates 'in consideration of certain annuities amounting to £2467 being redeemed

or allowed to remain charged upon the estates (the sum then necessary to redeem them being calculated at £23,500), and also in consideration of a sum of £55,000 to be paid to him: £13,000 part thereof as soon as it could be raised, and the remaining £42,000 within ten years.'

These latter sums were not paid until the estates had been sold in 1851, when with interest they amounted to £80,000, and that amount was handed over to creditors to whom D'Orsay had given securities on the estates. The annuities and the amount paid to his creditors out of the estates amounted to upwards of £103,500. Whilst residing in England he had an allowance of £550 a year from the Court of Chancery in Ireland, whilst his wife had £400.

In 1839 the first part of the *Idler in Italy* was published, and from none of her friends did Lady Blessington receive such enthusiastic praise as from him whose appreciation she valued most. Writing to her of the book Landor tells her 'Yesterday was a day of perfect delight to me. At eleven the *Idler in Italy* came to me, and we did not part till 10.50 this morning. I burst out, however, at page 244, on "the sublimity of our dense fogs, which leave so much to the imagination." Ay, truly, more than it can ever get through.

'This is the first time in my life I ever was in a hurry to put an end even to my part of conversation with you, but, really, I look every

moment from the paper to the book with a grudging eye, and cannot but think that I am playing the fool, who write when I could be reading.

'Accept my best thanks for so many hours of exquisite delight, so many just thoughts, generous sentiments, and pure imaginations. How glad I am now that I lost several days before the volumes came to me. I shall often take a trip into Italy with you, now you have been making a road for me, both more pleasant and more desirable than any of Bonaparte's.'

She was still 'working away like a steam engine' as D'Orsay used to say. Towards the end of this year Barry Cornwall writes to express his wonder and concern at her untiring labour. 'I hope' he says 'you will not continue to give up your nights to literary undertakings. Believe me (who have suffered bitterly for this imprudence) that nothing in the world of letters is worth the sacrifice of health, and strength, and animal spirits, which will certainly follow this excess of labour.'

In 1836 whilst continuing to edit the *Book of Beauty*, she had undertaken to write the entire letterpress for an annual called *Gems of Beauty;* her contributions consisting of 'fanciful illustrations in verse to twelve engravings of various subjects,' and in 1840 she added one more of these publications, the *Keepsake*, to her editorial care. In this latter year she brought out the second part of her *Idler in Italy*, and also published a novel, *The Belle of the Season.* She was now at the height of her popularity and

striving to reap what benefit she could from her success by working night and day.

This desire for gain was not the result of greed, for never did woman give more freely and fully. Indeed it was her unselfishness and generosity which was the means of gradually swamping her in debt. The number of relatives depending on her who alone of all the family could help, was for ever on the increase. Not only as she stated in one of her letters, had she to support her father, her youngest sister, her brother and his family, but Mrs Fairlie and her children were a heavy drag upon her; and there was forever a nephew to be educated and to be fitted out for India or the colonies where her interest procured them positions.

Added to this she allowed pensions to old servants, she largely aided the mother of her friend Miss Landon, and she gave far more than she could afford to the needy musicians and literary people who were continually besieging her with begging letters or personally applying to her for aid.

S. C. Hall narrates how he once became interested in a young man of good education and some literary taste, who with his wife and two children were in a state of absolute want. 'After some thought as to what had best be done for him, I suggested a situation in the Post Office as a letter carrier. He seized at the idea, but, being better aware than I was of the difficulties of obtaining it, expressed himself to that effect.

'I wrote to Lady Blessington telling her

the young man's story, and asking if she could get him the appointment. Next day I received a letter from her, enclosing one from the Secretary, regretting his utter inability to meet her wishes, such appointments, although so comparatively insignificant, resting with the Postmaster-General.

'I handed this communication to the young man, who was by no means disappointed, for he had not hoped for success. What was my surprise and delight, however, when the very next day there came to me another letter from Lady Blessington, enclosing one from the Postmaster-General conferring the appointment on the young man. This appointment I believe he still holds.' And writing of Lady Blessington on another occasion he says 'I have known of her so many kindly and generous acts, so much considerate sympathy, so ready a will to render timely help, so earnest a mind to assist any suffering artist or struggling professor of letter.'

No wonder that the Marquis Wellesley wrote to her 'If half the happiness you dispense to others is returned to yourself, you will be amongst the happiest of the human race. There is no great demand upon the gratitude of the world, to compromise your just claims, by the payment of one half.'

Nothing vexed her more than to be unable to pay bills sent into her, and her greatest anxiety was to keep out of debt. And that she might be free from such a burden she strove to curtail expenses and she laboured incessantly.

Writing in the middle of this year 1840 to a friend she says 'When I tell you that I have no less than three works passing through the press, and have to furnish the manuscript to keep the printers at work for one of them, you may judge of my unceasing and overwhelming occupation, which leaves me time neither for pleasure, nor for taking air or exercise enough for health. I am literally worn out, and look for release from my literary toils more than ever slave did from bondage. I never get out any day before five o'clock—have offended every friend or acquaintance I have by never calling at their doors—and am suffering in health from too much writing.'

The vexations of her daily life were at this time much increased by a rumour which associated D'Orsay with aiding and abetting Prince Louis Napoleon in the attempt made by him this year to force his claims upon France. The rumour was without foundation, for both she and D'Orsay regarded his effort as 'nothing short of madness;' and the *canard* was harmful to D'Orsay who then contemplated seeking some appointment in connection with the French Embassy. In a letter dated September 17th 1840 she writes to her friend Henry Bulwer who was now *Chargé d'affaires* in Paris 'I am never surprised at evil reports, however unfounded, still less so at any acts of friendship and manliness on your part. One is more consoled for the mortification inflicted by calumnies, by having a friend so prompt to remove the injurious

impressions they were likely to make. Alfred charges me to authorise you to contradict in the most positive terms, the reports about his having participated in, or even known of the intentions of Prince Louis. Indeed had he suspected them, he would have used every effort in his power to dissuade him from putting them into execution.

'Alfred as well as I entertain the sincerest regard for the Prince; but of his plans we knew no more than you did. Alfred by no means wishes to conceal his attachment to the Prince, and still less that any exculpation of himself should in any way reflect on him; but who so well as you, whose tact and delicacy are equal to your good nature, can fulfil the service to Alfred that we require?

'Lady C—— writes to me that I too am mixed up in the reports: but I defy the malice of my greatest enemy to prove that I even dreamt of the Prince's intentions or plans.'

Prince Louis Napoleon's attempt resulted in his being sentenced to imprisonment for life in the fortress of Ham. From there on January 13th 1841 he wrote to his old friend saying 'I have received only to-day your letter of January, because being in English it was necessary to send it to the Ministry in Paris to be read. I am very grateful for your remembrance, and I think with grief that none of your previous letters have reached me. I have received from Gore House only one letter, from Count D'Orsay, which I hastened to answer while I was at the Con-

ciergerie. I bitterly regret that my letter was intercepted, for in it I expressed all the gratitude at the interest he took in my misfortunes. I will not describe to you all I have suffered. Your poetic soul and your noble heart have guessed how cruel the position is where defence is restricted within impassable limits and reserve is placed in justification.

'In such a case the only consolation against all calumnies and strokes of fate is the voice that speaks from the bottom of your heart and absolves you, and the reception of marks of sympathy from exceptionally gifted natures, that like yours madam, are separated from the crowd by the elevation of their sentiments, by the independence of their character, and never let their affections or judgments depend on the caprices of fortune or the fatalities of destiny.

'I have been for three months in the Fort of Ham, with General Montholon and Dr Conneau. All communication from without is refused to me. Nobody has yet been able to come and see me. I will send you some day a view of the citadel that I have drawn from a little lithograph: for as you will understand, I don't know the outside of the fort.

'My thoughts often wander to the place where you live and I recall with pleasure the time I have passed in your amiable society, which the Count D'Orsay still brightens with his frank and spiritual gaiety. However I do not desire to leave the place where I am, for

here I am in my place. With the name I bear I must have the gloom of a cell or the light of power. If you should deign, madam, to give me sometimes news of London society, and of a country in which I have been too happy not to love it, you would confer a great pleasure on me.'

CHAPTER VII

Friendship of Dickens for Lady Blessington—His Letters — The Shadows deepen — Macready writes—Letters from Mrs Charles Mathews—Charles Dickens Abroad—Bulwer is Melancholy —D'Orsay becomes an Artist by Profession—The Duke of Wellington is pleased—Portrait of Byron—An Ivy Leaf from Fiesole.

LADY BLESSINGTON had now passed her fiftieth year, and her tendency to stoutness had increased. The symmetrical outlines that at an earlier age had distinguished her figure, disappeared, but the old grace of movement remained. Her natural good taste led her to submit to the inevitable with becoming dignity. She sought no aid from art in order to lessen in appearance the fulness of her age. S. C. Hall said, no one more carefully studied how to grow old gracefully than did Lady Blessington. 'No one knew better that the charms of youth are not the attractions of age. She was ever admirably dressed, but affected none of the adornments that become deformities when out of harmony with time.'

He adds that there was nothing artificial in

aught she said or did; nothing hurried or self-distrustful about her. 'She seemed perfectly conscious of power, but without the slightest assumption or pretence. It was easy to believe in her fascinating influence over all with whom she came in contact: but it was as little difficult to feel assured that such influence would be exercised with generosity, consideration, and sympathy.'

From one of her own sex, Mrs Newton Crosland, who first met her in 1840, we have a personal description of Lady Blessington as she appeared at that time. 'Through all the years I knew her' says this writer 'she never varied her style of head-dress. What hair was visible was of a chestnut hue, braided down the cheeks, while straight across the forehead, in what I can only describe as the lady abbess fashion, was a piece of rich lace or blond, but the same material was brought down one side of the face and drawn tight as if supporting the chin, and invisibly fastened on the other. The lace set her face as if in a frame and hid many tell-tale lines of advancing years.' Mrs Newton Crosland not only gives her impressions of Lady Blessington, but also of the library where she usually received; a place the visitor thought 'sacred to kindly thoughts and kindly speech, where bright ideas had birth and angry words were never spoken.'

One of the first letters Lady Blessington received in January 1841 came from Bulwer, who in 1838 had been made a baronet. As industrious as herself he had since that time

written *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu*, *The Sea Captain*, and *Money*. Nor had his wife been idle, for in 1839 she had published a novel, *Cheveley or the Man of Honour*, in which her husband under the thinnest disguise figured as the villain. Writing to Lady Blessington he tells her he shrinks 'from returning to London with its fever and strife. I am tired of the stone of *Sisyphus*, the eternal rolling up and the eternal rolling down. I continue to bask delighted in the light of Schiller. A new great poet is like a discovery of a lost paradise. It reconciles us to the gliding away of youth, when we think that, after all, the best pleasures are those which youth and age can enjoy alike—the intellectual.'

About this time she became acquainted with Charles Dickens who had already written *Pickwick*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Barnaby Rudge*. Forster vouches for the warm regard the great author had for her 'and for all the inmates of Gore House: how uninterruptedly joyous and pleasurable were his associations with them; and what valued help they gave him in his preparation for Italy.'

In a letter dated June 2d 1841, Dickens writes to her 'The year goes round so fast that when anything occurs to remind me of its whirling, I lose my breath and am bewildered. So your handwriting last night had as startling an effect upon me, as though you had sealed your note with one of your own eyes.'

This note was to remind him of a contribu-

tion he had promised for one of her annuals which 'in cheerful duty bound and with Heaven's grace' he declares he will redeem. But at that moment he hasn't the faintest idea how; however he is going to Scotland to see Jeffrey and whilst away will look out 'for some accident, incident, or subject for small description' which he will send her on his return. He knows she will take the will for the deed.

He then inquires if she has seen Townshend's Magnetic Boy, of whom he has no doubt she has heard from Count D'Orsay. 'If you get him to Gore House' he says 'don't I entreat you have more than eight people—four is a better number—to see him. He fails in a crowd and is marvellous before a few.

'I am a believer in earnest, and I am sure you would be if you saw the boy under moderately favourable circumstances, as I hope you will before he leaves England.'

In this year she was unsettled and depressed. In the spring she had suffered severely from trachea, so that the doctors considered it imprudent for her to remain in England another winter. And for this reason as likewise in the hope of curtailing her expenses, she thought of taking up her residence permanently in Italy, a country to which she turned in memory continually.

In this year Count D'Orsay's liabilities swelled to the respectable sum of £107,000: this amount being principally due to tradesmen, and quite irrespective of debts owing to private

friends which amounted to about £13,000 more. At this crisis some efforts were made by him to pass through the bankruptcy court, but these had to be abandoned owing to the impossibility of identifying him with either commercial or agricultural pursuits. It will seem strange that an idea of paying all his debtors and of becoming fabulously wealthy by means of alchemy, loomed large behind the mind of this elegant dandy. But certain it is that at one time he was filled with magnificent visions of changing base metal into gold by means of the great secret, the pursuit of which had sapped the life and broken the spirit of mediæval visionaries. And it is possible that if he had had in his possession the necessary funds to build the laboratory and prepare the crucible, he too would have joined the pale procession of weary searchers whose hopes had beheld the gains on which their eyes had never rested.

Meanwhile, as he was sauntering through the streets one day, airy, magnificent, and smiling, a hand was laid roughly on his shoulder and in the twinkling of an eye he found himself arrested for a debt of £300 owing to his bootmaker, M'Henry of Paris. Like all his bills this had been accumulating for years, and no notice had been vouchsafed to repeated demands for payment, so that M'Henry reluctantly found himself obliged to take this step. He was unwilling however to imprison his debtor from whom he accepted certain securities.

This arrest being made, D'Orsay believed himself no longer free to take the air; for in every step behind him, in every touch upon his arm, he would hear and feel the executor of the law, the dreaded bailiff. The number of his creditors outstripped his memory, and they were now resolved to follow an example which had proved successful in obtaining security if not payment for debt. And to a man of his luxurious nature and refined tastes, the thought of a prolonged residence in the Fleet Prison, was fraught with horrors. There was but one means of escaping danger, he must no longer venture abroad, save on Sundays, on which day he would be free from the bailiff's clutch.

After a consultation with Lady Blessington he took up his residence in Gore House where he could continue to enjoy the society of their mutual friends, and take exercise in the spacious grounds attached to her mansion. It now became apparent to the Count that something must be done to mend his fortunes, and he therefore agreed to the suggestion frequently made before by Lady Blessington, that he should seek employment in diplomacy, for which his talents and characteristics peculiarly fitted him.

Accordingly all the interest and influence which Lady Blessington could exercise were used to obtain him the position of secretary to the French Embassy in London, or failing that of the secretaryship to the Embassy at Madrid, which was at this time vacant.

At one moment indeed he received positive assurances from those in a position to give them, that he would receive the former appointment; and that it was only necessary as a matter of etiquette that the Count St Aulaire, French Ambassador to the Court of St James, should ask for the nomination to have it granted.

The highest commendations on D'Orsay's abilities, were given by men of rank, and stress was laid on the services which he was capable of rendering to the French Government, which were blandly received by the Count St Aulaire. This worthy courtier was not however satisfied with such testimonies, but according to Lady Blessington he 'consulted a *coterie* of foolish women, and listening to their malicious gossiping, he concluded that the nomination would not be popular in London, and so was afraid to ask for it.' She adds 'It now appears that the Foreign Office at Paris is an inquisition into the private affairs of those who have the misfortune to have any reference to it.'

On this subject Henry Bulwer wrote to her, 'I think D'Orsay wrong in these things you refer to: to have asked for London especially, and not to have informed me how near the affair was to its maturity when St Aulaire went to the Duke of B——'s, because I might then have prepared opinion for it here: whereas I first heard the affair mentioned in a room, where I had to contend against every person present, when I stated what

I think—that the appointment would have been a very good one.

'But it does not now signify talking about the matter, and saying that I should have wished our friend to have given the matter rather an air of doing a favour than of asking one. It is right to say that he has acted most honourably, delicately, and in a way which ought to have served him, though perhaps it is not likely to do so.

'The French Ambassador did not I think, wish for the nomination. M. Guizot I imagine is at this moment afraid of anything that might excite discussion and opposition, and it is idle to disguise from you that D'Orsay, both in England and here, has many enemies. The best service I can do him is by continuing to speak of him as I have done amongst influential persons, viz. as a man whom the Government would do well to employ: and my opinion is, that if he continues to wish for and to seek employment, that he will obtain it in the end. But I don't think he will obtain the situation he wished for in London, and I think it may be some little time before he gets such a one as he ought to have, and that would suit him.

'The secretaryship in Spain would be an excellent thing, and I would aid the marshal in anything he might do or say respecting it. I shall be rather surprised however if the present man is recalled. Well, do not let D'Orsay lose courage. Nobody succeeds

in these things just at the moment he desires. Remember also how long it was, though I was in Parliament and had some little interest, before I was myself fairly launched in the *diplomatic career.* Alfred has all the qualities for success in anything but he must give the same trouble and pains to the pursuit he now engages in, that he has given to other pursuits previously. At all events though I speak frankly and merely what I think to him, I am here and always a sincere and affectionate friend, and most desirous to prove myself so.'

Deeper and deeper, shadows began gradually to gather round her. In February 1843 died Isabella Fairlie the little grand-niece whom she tenderly loved, the fairy-like delicate child who would dance and caper in the sunshine, who would sit for hours motionless at Lady Blessington's feet whilst she worked, and who whilst in pain would look upon that kindly face with an expression that more than supplied the words she could never speak.

'We have lost our darling Isabella' the Countess writes to Landor 'the dear and gifted child, who though deaf and dumb, possessed more intelligence than thousands who can hear and speak. Attacked about three months ago with a complaint in her chest, I nursed her here and had hoped for her final recovery, when on the 4th of January her poor mother's impatience to have her with her again, induced me to take her down to

Cheveley. A few days after a relapse ensued and on the 31st she resigned her pure soul to God. . . . How fond my darling Isabella was of you. Do you remember her endearing ways and all her attractions? This blow has fallen heavily on us all, and you I know will feel it. My heart is too full to write more, but I could no longer leave your letter unanswered.'

Two months after the child's death, her mother died. Affectionate to all her nieces, Lady Blessington was fondest of Mrs Fairlie whose loss came as a heavy blow. The letters of sympathy which poured in on Lady Blessington, though they could not lighten her sorrow, showed how fully it was shared by her friends. A note from William Macready will give the general tone her correspondents expressed.

'All who are acquainted with a disposition like yours,' he says 'so quick to befriend and so sensible of kindness, would wish that such a nature should be exempt from suffering, whilst they feel with what extreme severity affliction such as you have been called upon to bear, must press upon you. I do indeed sympathise with your griefs, and wish with condolence there were consolation to offer; that is only to be drawn from the resource of your own mind and heart, so rich in all that is amiable. But there must be something akin to comfort, in the reflection of how very many mourn for your sorrows.'

Her own feelings will best be understood

from the following communication which Lady Blessington addressed to Henry Bulwer. 'Of all the kind letters' she says 'received in the late bereavement that has left so great a blank in my life, none have so much touched me as yours: for I know how to appreciate the friendship which prompts you to snatch from time so actively and usefully employed as yours always is, a few minutes for absent and sorrowing friends. This last blow though not unexpected, has nevertheless fallen heavily on me, and the more so that the insidious malady which destroyed my poor dear niece, developed so many endearing qualities in her sweet and gentle nature, that her loss is the more sincerely felt. Two months before this last sad event we lost her little girl, that sweet and interesting child whose beauty and intelligence (though poor thing she was deaf and dumb) you used to admire. This has indeed been a melancholy year to me.

'Alfred's position as you may well imagine, would of itself fill me with chagrin, and the protracted illness of two beings so dear to me, closed by their deaths, has added the last blow to my troubles. May you, my dear Henry, be long spared from similar trials, and be left health and long life to enjoy your well-merited reputation, in which no one more cordially rejoices than your sincere affectionate friend.'

Her own afflictions did not however prevent her from sympathising with others stricken like herself, as may be seen by a letter written by her at this time to John Forster, on the

loss of his younger brother Christopher to whom he was much attached. 'I thought of you often last evening and this day. I have felt all that you are now undergoing thrice in my life, and know what a painfully unsettled state of mind it produces, what a dread of the present, what a doubt of the future: what a yearning after the departed, and what an agonising conviction that never was the being while in life so fondly, so tenderly loved as now when the love is unavailing. Judge then, after three such trials, how well I can sympathise in yours. I feel towards you as some traveller returned from a perilous voyage, where he narrowly escaped shipwreck, feels, when he sees a dear friend exposed to similar danger, and would fain make his sad experience useful to him.

'I am glad you have heard from our friend. To find a friend when one most needs consolation, is indeed something to be grateful for; and I am glad when anything brings back old and dear associations. Perhaps if we could all see each other's hearts, there would be no misgivings, for coldness of manner often covers warmth of heart, as to use a very homely simile, wet slack covers over the warm fire beneath. My nieces send you their cordial regards. Count D'Orsay will be the bearer of this. God bless and comfort you prays your cordial friend.'

And later she assures Forster that if the warmest sympathy of his friends at Gore House could alleviate his grief, he might be assured its bitterness would be softened. 'We feel so sincere

a regard for you, that the loss you have sustained cannot be a matter of indifference to us, and therefore we hope you will come to us *en famille* without the fear of meeting other guests, until your spirits are more equal to encountering a mixed society.'

Forster himself fell ill and was unable to avail himself of her kindness, whereon she writes to him that if he knew the anxiety they all felt for his health, and the fervent prayers they offered up for its speedy restoration, he would be convinced that though he had friends of longer date, he had none more affectionately and sincerely attached to him than those of Gore House. 'I claim the privilege of an old woman' she adds 'to be allowed to see you as soon as a visitor in a sick-room can be admitted. Sterne says that "a friend has the same right as a physician" and I hope you will remember this. Count D'Orsay every day regrets that he cannot go and nurse you, and we both often wish you were here, that we might try our power of alleviating your illness, if not of curing you. God bless you and restore you speedily to health.'

In January 1844 Mrs Charles Mathews wrote a letter to Lady Blessington which gives additional testimony of her unceasing efforts to benefit others. Mrs Mathews was now in straitened circumstances owing to her husband's death and the unsuccessful theatrical enterprises of her son. Under these conditions she was materially helped by the Countess, to whom she writes 'I ought never

to address you my beloved and excellent friend without repeating my grateful thanks for the continuous favours received from you; but your goodness to me is "where every day I turn a page to read." Such generous and spontaneous friendship as you have shown to me, at the needful time, reconciles a world of ingratitude from those I have served. How few debts of magnitude are paid by the recipients. Let them repair their injustice by prompting *others* to return such benefits, and thus all is made even.

'God bless you my dearest Lady Blessington, and reward you, as *He will*, for your generous and benevolent feelings, *actively* manifested to all around you, and to your ever affectionate and obliged friend.'

It is instructive to learn that the woman who so deplores the ingratitude of others, could after Lady Blessington's death write of a mutual friend stating that 'I really thought well of my poor friend and believe I can *afford* to *own* my friendship for her.'

But whilst the Countess was still amongst the living, and probably whilst Mrs Mathews was influenced by the sense of favours yet to come, she could end a letter of thanks for a fresh obligation received by the following paragraph. 'And now my dear, respected, and truly beloved *friend* (a friend in the most extended sense of that too often misapplied word) accept once more my most grateful acknowledgements for all your generous and kindly acts, and pray believe that I am

dearest Lady, your faithfully affectionate etc.' Lady Blessington in the midst of her own heavy anxieties was not only helping Mrs Mathews regarding the publication of her book but was also striving to obtain for her a sum from the Committee of the Literary Fund to which Mrs Mathews had small claim. Lady Blessington's exertions were successful and a grant of fifty pounds was made to Mrs Mathews on the 13th of March 1844 and this is how she acknowledged her obligations to the Countess.

'I think this is *magnificent* and feel that—under heaven—I owe this as well as other benefits to *you*, my most feeling and excellent friend: they have thus placed me above a thousand fears and embarrassments. May God bless and fulfil all your desires here and reward your goodness hereafter.

'I can now say but this much, in return for what I owe to you, and how *much* that is. I am so agitated and so *weak* from my late sufferings, that I can hardly guide my pen: but I could not pause a moment in conveying to your kind benevolent heart this success of your advice for my benefit. I am still in my room, and in more confusion and discomfort than *you* can ever grasp at. Upon the instant that I am able and the present tenant has vacated the cottage, I shall remove. Let what will occur to me, as to sickness after I am there, I now shall be quite unembarrassed, and my mind as to *self* easy, I trust for life: and when you lay your head

upon your pillow, do not forget that I owe the means to your friendly counsel as well as other aid, and believe that I never close my eyes without offering up a prayer for you.

'I hardly know what I am writing, for I am all in a bubble, and therefore pray, pray overlook the manner and the matter of this letter. Heaven bless you my dear, dear Lady Blessington. Your attached grateful friend.'

In March of this year Charles Dickens writes to tell her he has made up his mind to see the world and to decamp, bag and baggage, the following midsummer for a twelvemonth; and proposes to establish his family in some convenient place from where he could make personal ravages on the neighbouring country. Somehow or other he had got it into his head that Nice would be a favourable spot for headquarters, and begs to have the benefit of her advice.

'If you will tell me' he continues 'when you have ten minutes to spare for such a client, I shall be delighted to come to you and guide myself by your opinion. I will not ask you to forgive me for troubling you, because I am sure beforehand that you will do so. I beg to be kindly remembered to Count D'Orsay and to your nieces. I was going to say "the Misses Power" but it looks so like the blueboard at a ladies' school, that I stopped short.'

Lady Blessington felt pleasure in giving him every possible hint and help regarding his proposed journey, and whilst abroad he wrote

her long and delightful letters, which he subsequently borrowed from her when writing his *Pictures in Italy*. In one of these addressed Milan, November 1844, he says 'Appearances are against me. Don't believe them. I have written you in intention, fifty letters, and I can claim no credit for any one of them (though they were the best letters you ever read) for they all originated in my desire to live in your memory and regard.

'Since I heard from Count D'Orsay I have been beset in I don't know how many ways. First of all I went to Marseilles, and came back to Genoa. Then I moved to the Peschiere. Then some people who had been present at the Scientific Congress here, made a sudden inroad on that establishment and over-ran it. Then they went away and I shut myself up for one month, close and tight, over my little Christmas book *The Chimes*. All my affections and passions got turned and knotted up in it, and I became as haggard as a murderer long before I wrote "The End."

'When I had done that, like the man in *The Man of Thessaly*, who having scratched his eyes out in a quickset hedge, plunged into a bramble bush to scratch them in again, I fled to Venice to recover the composure I had disturbed. From thence I went to Verona and to Mantua. And now I am here—just come up from underground and earthy all over, from seeing that extraordinary tomb in which the Dead Saint lies in an

alabaster case, with sparkling jewels all about him to mock his dusty eyes, not to mention the twenty franc pieces which devout votaries were flinging down upon a sort of skylight in the cathedral pavement above, as if it were the counter of his heavenly shop.

'You know Verona? You know everything in Italy *I* know. I am not learned in geography and it was a great blow to me to find that Romeo was only banished five-and-twenty miles. It was a greater blow to me to see the old house of the Capulets, with some genealogical memorials still carved in stone, over the gateway of the courtyard. It is a most miserable little inn, at this time ankle-deep in dirt; and noisy vetturini and muddy market carts were disputing possession of the yard with a brood of geese, all splashed and bespattered as if they had their yesterday's white trousers on.'

The Roman amphitheatre in this town delighted him beyond expression. He had never seen anything so full of solemn ancient interest: he looked at the four-and-forty rows of seats as fresh and perfect as if their occupants had vacated them but yesterday, the entrances, passages, dens, rooms, corridors, the numbers over some of the arches. An equestrian troop had been there some days before he visited it, had scooped out a little ring at one end of the arena, and had their performance in that spot.

'I should like to have seen it, of all things for its very dreariness.' He continues 'Fancy a hand-

ful of people sprinkled over one corner of the great place: (the whole population of Verona would not fill it now:) and a spangled cavalier bowing to the echoes, and the grass-grown walls. I climbed to the topmost seat and looked away at the beautiful view for some minutes; when I turned round and looked down into the theatre again, it had exactly the appearance of an immense straw hat, to which the helmet of the Castle of Otranto was a baby; the rows of seats representing the different plaits of straw and the arena the inside of the crown.

'I had great expectations of Venice, but they fell immeasurably short of the wonderful reality. The short time passed there went by me in a dream. I hardly think it possible to exaggerate its beauties, its sources of interest, its uncommon novelty and freshness. A thousand and one realisations of the thousand and one nights, could hardly captivate and enchant me more than Venice.'

Whilst at Genoa he visited Albaro and saw Il Paradiso which was spoken of as hers. He wishes he were rich and could buy the palace. Below Byron's house, a third-rate wine-shop had established itself, and the whole place looked dull, miserable, and ruinous enough.

'Pray say to Count D'Orsay everything that is cordial and loving from me' this long letter ends. 'The travelling purse he gave me has been of immense service. It has been constantly opened. All Italy seems to yearn to put its hand into it. I think of hanging it when I

come back to England on a nail as a trophy, and of gashing the brim like the blade of an old sword, and saying to my son and heir as they do upon the stage "You see this notch boy? Five hundred francs were laid low on that day for post horses. Where this gap is a waiter charged your father treble the correct amount—and got it. This end worn into teeth like the rasped edge of an old file, is sacred to the Custom Houses, boy, the passports, and the shabby soldiers at town gates, who put an open hand and a dirty coat cuff into the coach windows of all *forestieri*. Take it, boy, thy father has nothing else to give."'

It is a coincident that on the date which this letter bears, another was written to Lady Blessington by an author whose fame at this time seemed more firmly established than that of Charles Dickens. This was from Bulwer, whom Dickens thought on first meeting 'a little weird occasionally, regarding magic and spirits.' The tones which pervade these communications are wide apart; the one being buoyant and healthy, the other weary and melancholy. 'Literature' writes the novelist who had but recently produced *Zanoni*, 'literature with me, seems dead and buried. I read very little, and write nought. I find stupidity very healthy. . . . to write as we do miracles with logic is a mistake. As I grow older and I hope wiser, I feel how little reason helps us through the enigmas of this world. God gave us imagination and faith, as the two sole instincts of the future. He who

reasons where he should imagine and believe —prefers a rush-light to the stars.'

Meanwhile Count D'Orsay, having been unable to obtain employment in the diplomatic service, found time lie heavy on his hands, until again acting on the wise advice of his friend, he resolved to turn his talents to profitable account and make a profession of the arts he had previously practised as an amateur. Once started he worked with enthusiasm A studio was fitted up in the basement of Gore House, and here day after day he modelled, and painted, and sketched the friends who faithfully gathered round him. In a few years Mitchell the publisher issued about a hundred and fifty portraits the Count had drawn of his friends, which were considered free in delineation and excellent as likenesses.

As a sculptor his work was unconventional in treatment, full of force, and delicately finished, and many wondered he had not previously wholly devoted himself to art. Amongst those who sat to him for statuettes were Napoleon, Wellington, and Lord Lyndhurst, and so pleased was the Iron Duke with his likeness that he gave orders to have copies of his statuette executed in silver, and declared he would sit to D'Orsay for his portrait. The painting of this was anxious and troublesome work; for though the Duke was willing to give as many sittings as were necessary, he was extremely critical with the result and insisted on having changes made until it pleased himself. When however it was quite

finished he shook hands warmly with the artist saying 'At last I have been painted like a gentleman. I'll never sit to anyone else.' And in writing to Lady Blessington he declares 'Count D'Orsay will really spoil me, and make me vain in my old age, by sending me down to posterity by the exercise of every description of talent with which he is endowed.'

One of the portraits which best satisfied D'Orsay's critical taste was that which he painted of Byron. As may be remembered, he had sketched the poet whilst at Genoa, but neither this nor any other likeness of Byron pleased him, until this later and more careful work of his own hand was produced. It was universally pronounced excellent, and was in due time engraved, when Lady Blessington sent a copy to the Countess Guiccioli with a letter in which she says—'You have, I daresay, heard that your friend Count D'Orsay has taken to painting, and such has been the rapidity of his progress, that he has left many competitors who have been for fifteen years painters, far behind.

'Dissatisfied with all the portraits that have been painted of Lord Byron, none of which rendered justice to the intellectual beauty of his noble head, Count D'Orsay at my request has made a portrait of our great poet, and it has been pronounced by Sir John Cam Hobhouse, and all who remember Lord Byron, to be the best likeness of him ever painted. The picture possesses all the noble intelligence

and fine character of the poet's face, and will I am sure delight you when you see it. We have had it engraved, and when the plate is finished, a print will be sent to you. It will be interesting, *chère et aimable amie*, to have a portrait of our great poet from a painting by one who so truly esteems you; for you have not a truer friend than Count D'Orsay, unless it be me. How I wish you were here to see the picture. It is an age since we met, and I assure you we all feel this long separation as a great privation. I shall be greatly disappointed if you are not as delighted with the engraving as I am, for it seems to me the very image of Byron.'

Towards the end of this year 1844, Lady Blessington ever mindful of her friends, wrote to wish Landor a happy Christmas and sent him a seal waistcoat as a token of remembrance. In response he says 'Before I open any other letter, I must thank you for the graceful lines you have written to me. They will keep my heart warmer, and adorn me more than the waistcoat. Nothing can be dearer to me than your recollection, accompanied by such invariable kindness. Every friend I have in the world knows how highly I esteem your noble qualities, and I never lose an opportunity of expatiating on them.

'You have left me nothing to wish but a favourable account of your health, and a few words about my other friends at Gore House. To-morrow I am promised your new novel. With your knowledge of the world, and what

is rarer, of the human heart, the man is glorified who enjoys your approbation; what then if he enjoys your friendship. Often and often in this foggy weather have I trembled lest you should have a return of the bronchitis. But I am credibly informed that the sun has visited London twice in the month of December. Let us hope that such a phenomenon may portend no mischief to the nation.'

Another friend of this man and ardent admirer of his genius was likewise thinking of him at this season of the year. This was Charles Dickens who before leaving England had asked Landor what he most wished to have in remembrance of Italy; when the latter in a sad voice said 'An ivy leaf from Fiesole.' When he visited Florence, Dickens drove out to Fiesole for his sake and asked the driver where was the villa in which the Landor family lived. 'He was a dull dog and pointed to Boccaccio's' wrote Dickens. 'I didn't believe him. He was so deuced ready that I knew he lied. I went up to the convent which is on a height, and was leaning over a dwarf wall basking in a noble view over a vast range of hill and valley, when a little peasant girl came up and began to point out the localities. *Ecco la Villa Landora* was one of the first half dozen sentences she spoke. My heart swelled as Landor's would have done when I looked down upon it, nestling among its olive trees and vines, and with its upper windows (there are five above the door) open to the setting sun. Over the centre of these there is another

storey, set upon the housetop like a tower; and all Italy except its sea, is melted down into the glowing landscape it commands. I plucked a leaf of ivy from the convent garden as I looked; and here it is. For Landor, with my love.'

Twenty years later when Landor was no more, this ivy leaf was found treasured amongst his belongings.

CHAPTER VIII

Letters from Mrs Sigourney—Mrs S. C. Hall's Opinion of Lady Blessington—Charles Dickens Homeward Bound — Letter of D'Orsay to Dickens—A Double Grief — Lady Blessington as a Woman Journalist—*The Daily News* and Its Contributors—N. P. Willis again upon the Scene — Bitter Feelings aroused — Letter from Bulwer — Captain Marryat will fight — Willis says Farewell — Prince Louis returns — The Prince and Landor.

LADY BLESSINGTON was still working steadily. *The Idler in France*, which was an account of her stay in the French capital was published in 1841, and in the following year she brought out a novel, *The Lottery of Life*. In 1843 came *Meredith*, regarding which she received a letter from Mrs Sigourney an American poetess who enjoyed great popularity in her own country, and who whilst in England a short time before, had been introduced to Lady Blessington. 'Are you aware' writes Mrs Sigourney 'how much your novel *Meredith* is admired in these United States? I see it ranked in some of our leading periodicals as "the best work of the noble and talented

authoress." This they mean as high praise, since your other productions have been widely and warmly commended. We are, as you doubtless know, emphatically a reading people.

'Our magazines and many of the works that they announce go into the humble dwelling of the manufacturer, into the brown hand of the farmer, into the log-hut of the emigrant who sees around him the dark forms of the remnant of our aboriginal tribes, and hears the murmurs of the turbid Missouri, perhaps the breaking billows of the Pacific.

'I have recently become interested for the present year in one of those periodicals published for ladies in New York, which announces two thousand subscribers and assumes to have ten times that number of readers. Might I presume to ask of you so great a favour as to send in your next letter to me any scrap of poetry for it which you may happen to have by you. I am sure it would greatly delight the publisher thus to be permitted to place your name upon its pages; but if I have requested anything inconvenient or improper please to forgive it.

'I write this with one of the pens from the tasteful little writing-box you were so good as to send me, and repeat my thanks for that gift so acceptable in itself and so valued as from your hand.'

A few months later the same writer sends her thanks to Lady Blessington 'for the elegant copy of Heath's *Book of Beauty*,

which derives its principal interest in my view from your supervision.

'I felt quite humble at the tameness and unappropriateness of my own little poem, and the more so from the circumstance that the omission of one of the lines, at the close of the fifth stanza, deprives it both of rhythm and meaning. . . .

'I was sorry to see in the public papers that our friend Mr N. P. Willis had suffered from ill health. I trust, from the *naïveté* of his public letters, that he is quite well again. We consider him as one of our most gifted writers, and of course follow all his movements with interest. It gave me pleasure to be informed by you of the successful enterprise of Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall. They are excellent people, and I rejoice in their prosperity. Mrs Hall showed me much friendship when I was in your country, which I shall never forget.

'Among my obligations to her, I remember my delightful call at Gore House, and the first sight of yourself and your beautiful nieces, a combination of imagery which has lost none of its freshness or fascination by the lapse of time.'

Mrs S. C. Hall was a constant contributor to Lady Blessington's annuals and a frequent afternoon caller at Gore House, of whose mistress she would hear no ill word spoken; a rare virtue in one of her sex. 'I had no means of knowing' Mrs Hall once wrote 'whether what the world said of this most

beautiful woman was true or false, but I am sure *God* intended her to be good, and there was a deep-seated good intent in whatever she did that came under my observation. She never lost an opportunity of doing a gracious act or saying a gracious word.

'She found time, despite her literary labours, her anxieties, and the claims which she permitted Society to make upon her time, not only to do a kindness now and then for those in whom she felt an interest, but to give what seemed perpetual thought to their well-doing.

'Her sympathies were quick and cordial, and independent of worldliness; her taste in art and literature womanly and refined. I say "womanly," because she had a perfectly feminine appreciation of whatever was delicate and beautiful. There was great satisfaction in writing for her whatever she required, labours became pleasures from the importance she attached to every little attention paid to requests, which as an editor she had a right to command.

'Her manners were singularly simple and graceful, it was to me an intense delight to look upon beauty, which, though I never saw in its full bloom, was charming in its autumn time, and the Irish accent, and soft, sweet Irish laugh, used to make my heart beat with the pleasures of memory. I always left her with a sense of enjoyment, and a perfect disbelief in everything I ever heard to her discredit. Her conversation was not witty

nor wise, but it was in good tune and good taste, mingled with a good deal of humour, which escaped everything bordering on vulgarity, by a miracle.

'A tale of distress, or a touching anecdote, would at once suffuse her clear, intelligent eyes with tears, and her beautiful mouth break into smiles and dimples at even the echo of wit or jest. The influence she exercised over her circle was unbounded, and it became a pleasure of the most exquisite kind to give her pleasure.

'I think it ought to be remembered to her honour, that with all her foreign associations and habits, she never wrote a line that might not be placed on the bookshelves of any English lady.'

The impressions which she gave another gentlewoman were not less favourable. 'I can only say' writes Mrs Newton Crosland 'that in all my intercourse with Lady Blessington I cannot recall a word from her lips which conveyed an idea of laxity of morals, while very often her advice was excellent. She was always in a high degree generously sympathetic with the struggling and unfortunate, not in words only, but in actions, for she would take a great deal of trouble to do a small service, and was a kind friend to many who were shy of acknowledging their obligation.'

Amongst the most interesting letters which she received in the spring of 1845, is one from Charles Dickens who returning

homewards, writes from Genoa that he is once more in his old quarters and with rather a tired sole to his foot, from having found such an immense number of different resting-places for it since he went away. 'I write you my last Italian letter for this boat' he says in May 1845 'designing to leave here, please God, on the ninth of next month, and to be in London again by the end of June. I am looking forward with great delight to the pleasure of seeing you once more; and mean to come to Gore House with such a swoop as shall astonish the poodle, if after being accustomed to his own size and sense, he retain the power of being astonished at anything in the wide world.'

Speaking over the sights he has seen, he declares it next to impossible to exaggerate the interest of Rome; though he thought it possible to find the main source of interest in the wrong things. Naples disappointed him; the weather was bad during his stay there; but the country around charmed him.

'As to Vesuvius' he writes 'it burns away in my thoughts beside the roaring waters of Niagra: and not a splash of the water extinguishes a spark of the fire; but there they go on, tumbling and flaming night and day: each in its fullest glory.

'I have seen so many wonders, and each of them has such a voice of its own, that I sit all day long listening to the roar they make as if it were in a sea-shell; and have fallen into an idleness so complete, that I can't rouse

myself sufficiently to go into Pisa on the twenty-fifth, when the triennial illumination of the cathedral and Leaning Tower, and Bridges and what not, takes place. But I have already been there; and it cannot beat St Peter's, I suppose. So I don't think I shall pluck myself up by the roots, and go aboard a steamer for Leghorn.'

He thanks her in this letter for copies of the *Keepsake* and the *Book of Beauty*, and tells her he has been very much struck by two contributions in them; one of them being Landor's 'Conversations' 'among the most charming, profound, and delicate productions I have ever read. The other your lines on Byron's room in Venice. I am sure that you wrote it from your heart, as I am, that they found their way immediately to mine.'

As he anticipated he was back in town on the last days of June, and on the sixth of the following month D'Orsay wrote him the following note inviting him to lunch, and referring to Roche the courier who had proved so valuable to Dickens in his travels 'Mon cher Dickens,—Nous sommes enchantés de votre retour. Voici, thank God, Devonshire Place ressucité. Venez luncheoner demain à 1 heure, et amenez notre brave ami Forster. J'attends la perle fine des courriers. Vous l'immortalisez par ce certificat — la difficulté sera de trouver un maître digne de lui. J'essayerai de tout mon coeur. La Reine devroit le prendre pour aller en Saxe Gotha, car je suis convaincu qu'il est assez intelligent pour

pouvoir découvrir ce Royaume. Gore House vous envoye un cargo d'amitiés des plus sincères. Donnez de ma part 100,000 kind regards à Madame Dickens. Toujours votre affectionné D'Orsay. Jai vu le courrier, c'est le tableau de l'honnêteté, et de la bonne humeur. Don't forget to be here at one to-morrow.'

This year was destined to be fraught with sadness for Lady Blessington. So far back as 1835 her brother-in-law, John Manners Sutton, had lost the office of Speaker to the House of Commons, when he retired on a pension of four thousand a year and was raised to the peerage as Viscount Canterbury. This pension was small in comparison to the income and emoluments attached to the Speakership; he had never saved, and he had suffered a heavy loss of his household property by a fire at Palace Yard, compensation being refused him. As a consequence he was beset by debts and difficulties, to meet which his wife made every possible effort at economy, giving up her carriage, ceasing to entertain, and eventually selling some of her jewels. Her life was henceforth devoted to her husband whose health had begun to fail.

The end came to him more quickly than was expected, for in July 1845, whilst travelling on the Great Western Railway he was seized with apoplexy and remained insensible till his death which occurred three days later. This sudden affliction prostrated his wife who seemingly had no desire to survive him, and before four months had elapsed she had likewise passed out of life.

This double grief was bitterly felt by one in whom family affection was so strongly developed, as Lady Blessington. The shadows were gathering thicker and darker around one whose meridian had been filled by unexpected brilliancy. Writing to thank Landor for the sympathy he had at once written to express in her affliction, she says 'I have made more than one vain attempt to thank you for your letter but I could not accomplish the task. You will easily imagine my grief at losing the playmate of my childhood, the companion of my youth. Alas, alas, of the two heads that once rested on the same pillow, one now is laid in the dark and dreary vault at Clifton, far, far away from all she loved, from all that loved her.

'It seems strange to me that I should still breathe and think, when she who was my other self, so near in blood, so dear in affection, should be no more. I have now no one to remind me of my youth, to speak to me of the careless happy days of childhood. All seems lost with her in whose breast I found an echo to my thoughts. The ties of blood may sometimes be severed, but how easily, how quickly are they reunited again when the affection of youthful days is recalled. All that affection, has, as it were, sprung up afresh in my heart since my poor sister has known affliction. And now she is snatched from me, when I hoped to soothe her.'

As on former occasions she had sought refuge from painful thoughts in her work, so

did she again employ herself in writing; but not in the manner suggested to her by N. P. Willis, who with a keen eye to copy for which no subject was too sacred, wrote to her 'I hope dear Lady Blessington that the new though sad leaf of life that death has turned over for you, will not be *left wholly uncopied for the world.* You would make so sweet a book, if you did but embody the new spirit in which you now think and feel. Pardon my mention of it, but I thought while you were talking to me the other day, as if you could scarce be conscious how, with the susceptibilities and fresh view of genius, you were looking upon the mournful web weaving around you.' Her ever-active pen was now engaged in journalism, she being one of the first women employed in journalism in this country. The manner in which she became connected with the newspaper press is briefly told.

In the first month of the year 1846, the *Daily News* was started in opposition to the *Morning Chronicle;* with Charles Dickens for its editor, Bradbury and Evans for its principal proprietors, and a brilliant staff for its contributors amongst whom were John Forster who conducted the literary department; Charles Mackay who wrote for its columns a series of stirring poems called 'Voices from the Crowd'; Harriet Martineau who wrote leaders; George Hogarth the editor's father-in-law who was responsible for art criticisms; the elder Dickens, Blanchard Jerrold, and Joseph Archer Crowe who acted as parliamentary reporters.

The capital raised or promised for this new venture amounted to one hundred thousand pounds: the editor's salary was fixed at two thousand a year, then thought extremely liberal, the payment of the staff being on a corresponding scale. The price of the paper was fivepence.

When the staff of the *Daily News* was being organised, Lady Blessington was asked if she would supply the paper with 'any sort of intelligence she might like to communicate of the sayings, doings, memoirs, or movements in the fashionable world.'

To this she readily agreed, asking eight hundred a year as payment for her services. The sum was considered extravagant by the managers who however offered her four hundred for a year certain, or two hundred and fifty for six months, when the arrangement if satisfactory could be renewed. She accepted the latter sum and for the period stated sent in whatever 'exclusive intelligence' she could gather from her friends. Dickens after three weeks threw up his editorship, being 'tired to death and quite worn out' with the work, when the post was somewhat reluctantly taken by John Forster until someone could be found to relieve him from a toil and responsibility for which he had no liking. At the close of her six months' agreement the new editor declined to renew the engagement of Lady Blessington who therefore lost this source of easily-earned income.

Amongst her correspondence in the early

part of this year is an interesting note from Dickens, dated March the 2d. After stating that he is vexed at being unable to accept an invitation to dinner she had sent him, he acknowledges to a fear that he has no strength of mind, for he is always making engagements in which there is no prospect of satisfaction. And then he tells her that 'vague thoughts of a new book are rife within me just now; and I go wandering about at night into the strangest places, according to my usual propensity at such a time, seeking rest and finding none. As an addition to my composure I ran over a little dog in the Regent's Park yesterday (killing him on the spot) and gave his little mistress a girl of thirteen or fourteen, such exquisite distress as I never saw the like of.'

A correspondence had taken place before this period between her and N. P. Willis 'the social, sentimental and convivial' American journalist who had so freely described herself and her friends on his first acquaintance with them. Mr Willis had meanwhile travelled in Southern Europe, Turkey, and parts of Asia Minor, had married an English wife, had more than once crossed the Atlantic, and had published an English edition of *Pencillings By the Way*, in whose pages all his original sins of personality were to be found. Besides the uncomplimentary remarks he had made on Bulwer and Fonblanque, the book also contained an impertinent description of Dickens, to whom he referred as 'a young paragraphist of the *Morning Chronicle*'; an abusive reference

to Captain Marryat whose books it was declared had little circulation save at Wapping; and ill-natured remarks on the personal appearance of John Forster. Moreover some words Moore had spoken of O'Connell were given, that bred ill-feeling between them that lasted the remainder of their lives.

A storm of bitter feeling had therefore arisen against Willis, whom Lady Blessington could no longer invite to meet her guests; but with the kindly feelings that always distinguished her, she was willing to receive him in their absence. This resolution she made known to him in answer to a letter received from him written in Ireland, on which country he was about to write a book. Replying to her communication Willis says:—

'Your very kind note was forwarded to me here, and I need scarce say it gave me great pleasure. One of the strongest feelings of my life was the friendship you suffered me to cherish for you when I first came to England; and while I have no more treasured leaf in my memory than the brilliant and happy hours I passed in Seamore Place, I have I assure you no deeper regret than that my indiscretion in *Pencillings By the Way*, should have checked the freedom of my approach to you. Still my attachment and admiration (so unhappily recorded) are always on the alert for some trace that I am still remembered by you, and so you will easily fancy that the kind friendliness of your note gave me unusual happiness. My first pleasure when

I return to town will be to avail myself of your kind invitation and call at Gore House.'

As soon as his arrival in London was known, he received various unpleasant intimations of his offences from those who figured in his pages. In a note addressed to Lady Blessington he says, 'Fonblanque has written me a note, which without giving me ground for a quarrel, is very ungentlemanlike I think. Bulwer has written me too, and a more temperate, just, (though severe) and gentlemanly letter I never read. He gives me no quarter, but I like him the better for having written it, and he makes me tenfold more ashamed of those silly and ill-starred letters. I enclose his letter to you, which I beg may not be seen by another eye than your own.'

The letter which N. P. Willis enclosed ran as follows:—

'SIR,—I delayed replying to your letter until I had read the paper in question, which agreeably to your request, Lady Blessington permitted me to see. With respect to myself individually, I require no apology: I have been too long inured to publicity to feel annoyed at personal reflections, which if discourteous, are at least unimportant; and as a public man I should consider myself a very fair subject for public exhibition, however unfavourably minute, except indeed from such persons as I have received as a guest.

'But in exonerating you freely, so far as any wound to my feelings is concerned, I think it but fair to add, since you have pointedly

invited my frankness, that I look with great reprehension upon the principle of feeding a frivolous and unworthy passion of the public from sources which the privilege of hospitality opens to us in private life. Such invasions of the inviolable decorums of society, impair the confidence which is not more its charm than its foundation, and cannot but render the English (already too exclusive) yet more rigidly on their guard against acquaintances who repay the courtesies of one country by caricatures in another. Your countrymen (and I believe yourself amongst the number) are not unreasonably sensitive as to any strictures on the private society of Americans. But I have certainly never read any work, any newspaper paragraph of which America is the subject, containing personalities so gratuitously detailed as those in which you have indulged.

'I allude in particular to the unwarrantable remarks upon Mr Fonblanque, a gentleman who, with so rare a modesty, has ever shrunk even from the public notice of the respectful admiration which in this country is the coldest sentiment he commands: and I rejoice to add, for the honour of England, that despite the envy of his fame and the courage of his politics, no Englishman has yet been found to caricature the man whom it is impossible to answer. Your description is not indeed recognisable by those who know Mr Fonblanque, but it is not to be considered so much on account of its inaccuracy,

as by the insensibility it appears to evince to the respect due to eminent men and to social regulation.

'You have courted my opinion and I have given it explicitly and plainly. I think you have done great disservice to your countrymen in this visit to England, and that in future we shall shrink from many claimants on our hospitality, lest they should become the infringers of its rights.'

But the worst was still to come, for Captain Marryat published in the pages of the *Metropolitan Review* an article that not only dealt with *Pencillings By the Way* but exposed its author to ridicule and contempt. This personal attack was not to be patiently borne by one who had treated others in a similar way. A defence was printed by Willis and circulated amongst his friends; letters were written to the *Times* airing this quarrel; and eventually a challenge to mortal combat was given and accepted, and only at the last moment was prevented by peace-loving seconds. Mr Willis soon after bade adieu to England never more to return. In his farewell letter to Lady Blessington, dated 1845, he says 'After some argument, with a reluctant heart, I have persuaded myself that it is better to say adieu to you on paper; partly from a fear that I might not find you alone should I call to-morrow (my last day in England:) and partly because my visit to you the other day forms a sweet memory, which I would not willingly risk overlaying with one less sympathetic.

'As a man is economical with his last sixpence, I am a miser of what is probably my last remembrance of you, believing as I do that I shall never again cross the Atlantic. I unwillingly forego, however, my expression of thanks and happiness for your delightful reception of my daughter's visit; and you were too tenderly human not to value what I could tell you of your impression on my mulatto servant. She saw you to love you, as any human being would who saw you as she did, without knowing the value of rank. Little Imogen talked a great deal of her visit when she returned, and your kind gift to her will be treasured.

'I leave here on Sunday morning for Portsmouth to embark, with the most grateful feeling for the kindness with which you have renewed your friendship towards me.'

The author of *Pelham* had in 1843 inherited his mother's property and assumed her family name of Lytton. In this year—1846—his health broke down again and he set out for Italy. He tells Lady Blessington that he had made a hurried journey to Genoa and suffered more than he had anticipated from fatigue. There he rested and sought to recruit; the weather was cold and stormy.

'With much misgiving' he wrote 'I committed myself to the abhorred powers of steam at Genoa, and ultimately re-found about two-thirds of my dilapidated self at Naples. There indeed the air was soft, the sky blue; and the luxurious sea slept calmly as ever

round those enchanting shores, and in the arms of the wondrous bay. But the old charms of novelty are gone. The climate though enjoyable I found most trying, changing every two hours, and utterly unsafe for the early walks of a water patient, or the moonlight rambles of a romantic traveller: the society ruined by the English and a bad set.

'The utter absence of intellectual occupation gave me the spleen, so I fled from the balls and the treacherous smiles of the climate, and travelled by slow stages to Rome, with some longings to stay at Mola, which were counteracted by the desire to read the newspapers, and learn Peel's programme for destroying his friends the farmers. The only interesting person, by the way, I met at Naples, was the Count of Syracuse, the king's brother; for he is born with the curse of ability (though few discover, and fewer still acknowledge it) and has been unfortunate enough to cultivate his mind, in a country and in a rank where mind has no career. Thus he is in reality afflicted with the *ennui* which fools never know, and clever men only dispel by active exertions. And it was melancholy to see one with the accomplishments of a scholar, and the views of a statesman, fluttering away his life amongst idle pursuits, and seeking to amuse himself by billiards and *lansequenet*. He has more charming manners than I ever met in a royal person, except Charles the Tenth, with a dignity

that only evinces itself by sweetness. He reminded me of Schiller's Prince in the *Ghost Seer.*

'And so I am at Rome. As Naples now a second time disappointed me, so Rome which saddened me before, revisited grows on me daily. I only wish it were not the Carnival, which does not harmonise with the true charm of the place, its atmosphere of art and repose. I pass my time quietly enough with long walks in the morning, and the siesta in the afternoon. In the evening I smoke my cigar in the Forum, or on the Pincian Hill, guessing where Nero lies buried —Nero who in spite of his crimes (probably exaggerated) has left so gigantic a memory in Rome, a memory that meets you everywhere, almost the only Emperor the people recall. He must have had force and genius, as well as brilliancy and magnificence, for the survival. And he died so young.'

Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton was back in England in the summer and in the following winter came his poem '*The New Timon.*' Writing from Knebworth, December 24th 1846 to Lady Blessington he says 'I am extremely grateful my dearest friend for your kind letter, so evidently meant to encourage me, amidst the storm which howls around my little boat. And indeed it is quite a patch of blue sky, serene and cheering through the very angry atmosphere which greets me elsewhere. I view it as an omen, and sure I am, at least, that the blue sky will endure long after the last blast has howled itself away.

'Perhaps in some respects it is fortunate that I have had so little favour shown to me, or rather so much hostility, in my career. If I had once been greeted by the general kindness and indulgent smiles that have for instance rewarded — I should have been fearful of a contrast in the future, and satisfied at so much sunshine, gathered in my harvests, and broken up my plough. But all this vituperation goads me on. Who can keep quiet when the tarantula bites him?

'I write this from a prison, for we are snowed up all round; and to my mind the country is dull enough in the winter, without this addition to its sombre repose. But I shall stay as long as I can, for this is the time when the poor want us most.'

One day in May 1846 Lady Blessington whilst working in her library was surprised to hear announced the name of a man on whom sentence of imprisonment for life had been passed: and rising up saw Prince Louis Napoleon, looking haggard and pallid, a growth of stubble on his lip. After six years of confinement he had escaped from the fortress of Ham in the disguise of a workman, carrying a plank upon his shoulder. He had at once returned to England and reaching London sought Gore House. Here Lady Blessington invited him to take up his residence, and knowing that he was penniless offered him every assistance she could give. John Forster had been invited to dine quietly that

evening with Lady Blessington, her nieces, and Count D'Orsay, and on arriving was much surprised to find Prince Louis an addition to the party, of which he wrote an account to Landor next day. 'After dinner the Prince described his way of escape by passing through the fortress gates in a labourer's blouse and sabots, with a heavy plank on his shoulder, flinging off the plank into the ditch by the wall of the château, and afterward, shod as he was, running nearly two miles to where a little cart provided by Conneau waited to take him within reach of the coast, from which he had crossed but the day before: all of it told in his usual un-French way, without warmth or excitement. Before or since I have never seen his face as it was then; for he had shaved his moustaches as part of his disguise, and his lower and least-pleasing features were completely exposed under the straggling stubble of hair beginning again to show itself.'

In August Lady Blessington who had been ordered change of air, went to Bath, selecting that ancient city principally because her faithful friend Landor was there. It so happened that Prince Louis was visiting Bath at the same time, when Landor left his card on Napoleon who in return visited Landor. Thereon a pleasant and friendly conversation followed. Amongst other things the Prince said he was engaged upon a military work, a copy of which when completed he would have the pleasure of sending to Landor:

for which intention the author of the *Conversations* heartily thanked him but honestly said he could not request the Prince to accept a copy of his works, as they contained some severe strictures on his uncle the Emperor.

To this Napoleon replied he knew perfectly well what his opinions were and admired the frankness with which they were expressed on all occasions. Then Landor congratulated him on having escaped two great curses—a prison and a throne; on which the Prince smiled gravely but made no remark. He kept his promise of sending to Landor a copy of his book *Etudes sur le Passé et l'Avenir de l'Artillerie* the fly-leaf of which bore the following inscription 'À Monsieur W. S. Landor: témoignage d'estime de la part du P^ce^ Napoléon Louis B. qui apprécie le vrai mérite, quelque opposé qu'il soit à ses sentimens et a son opinion. Bath Sept. 6, 1846.'

CHAPTER IX

The Glory of Gore House is departing—Debts and Difficulties—A Waning Popularity—Letter from Dickens — Prince Louis becomes President — Enter a Bailiff — Flight to France — Beginning a New Life—Letter from Disraeli—Illness and Death—D'Orsay's Grief—The President's Ingratitude—Last Days of D'Orsay—Peace and Farewell.

THE glory of Gore House began to pale in the year 1847; for now came vexations and troubles treading close upon each other. Owing to famine and distress in Ireland, the payment of Lady Blessington's jointure had for the last two years been uncertain: but it now entirely ceased. This was the more unfortunate because she had been obliged to give bills and bonds to her bankers and creditors, in anticipation of her dower, for various sums amounting to about fifteen hundred pounds. If her income continued to be unpaid, the ruin which she so bravely sought to avert must overtake her at once.

In her distress she sought advice from a legal friend who assured her that nothing

was so indisputable in law, as that a widow's jointure took precedence of every other claim on an estate; and that the very first money the agent or steward receives from the property should go to the discharge of such a claim. But this was poor consolation when it was remembered that no rents were paid; and that the Irish people were, chiefly owing to the failure of the potato crop, striving to satisfy hunger by eating nettles and weeds, and were dying of famine by thousands.

Perhaps some comfort came to her in reading the concluding paragraph of the letter in which her legal friend says 'I know well how—to those accustomed to punctual payments and with a horror of debt—pecuniary embarrassments prey upon the mind. But I think they may be borne, not only with ease but with some degree of complacency, when connected with such generous devotions and affectionate services as those which must console you amidst all your cares. In emptying your purse you have at least filled your heart with consolations, which will long outlast what I trust will be but the troubles of a season.'

In her dilemma Lady Blessington knew not which way to turn for relief. She who had freely given and lent, declined to receive or borrow from others. The greater number of her jewels were already pledged, she now thought of selling them, and was advised to consult Anthony Rothschild on the subject: but their sale was deferred for the present.

The income derived from her pen had

rapidly decreased. Forced to write continually, the strain had become apparent in her work and her popularity waned. William Jerdan who as an old friend and literary adviser was likely to have a correct knowledge of her earnings, says that as an author and editor she gained between two and three thousand pounds per annum for some years. 'Her title as well as her talents' he tells us 'had considerable influence in "ruling high prices" as they say in Mark Lane and other markets. To this also, her well-arranged parties with a publisher now and then to meet folks of a style unusual to men in business contributed their attractions: and the same society was in reality of solid value towards the production of such publications as the annuals, the contents of which were provided by the editor almost entirely from the pens of private friends.'

So far back as June 1843, Mr Longman the publisher, writing from Paternoster Row tells her that merely five pounds have been offered for the early sheets of her forthcoming novel *Meredith*, by Messrs Lee & Blanchard of Philadelphia. A month later he takes the liberty of introducing to her Mr Bernard Tauchnitz of Leipzig 'the nephew of a well-known and respectable publisher in that city, whose object in visiting England is to make arrangements for publishing authorised editions of new works in Germany.'

In October of the same year Mr Longman wrote to tell her that *Meredith*, which presum-

ably had been published at her own risk, had not met with the success he anticipated; three hundred and eighty-four copies in all had been sold. 'I shall be obliged' says the publisher 'by your informing me whether you would wish it to be again advertised next month. It was your wish that we should not spend above fifty pounds without consulting you: we have spent only about forty-five.'

This was unwelcome news, but worse was to come; for two years later Mr Colbourn complains that he has sold only four hundred copies of her novel *Strathern or Life at Home and Abroad*, the result being that he has lost forty pounds by its publication. He adds that he must decline her suggestion that he should bring out another work from her pen.

Even with such disheartening results she continued to write novels, knowing that some sum however small would reward her labour. Therefore in 1846 she had published *Lionel Deerhurst*, and *The Memoirs of a Femme de Chambre*, and in this year, 1847, came *Marmaduke Herbert*, the last of her works she was to see published in volume form. The list of her misfortunes was not yet complete; for at the end of the year Heath, the publisher and proprietor of the *Book of Beauty*, died insolvent, being in her debt seven hundred pounds.

Her condition was pitiable. Beset by accounts she was unable to pay, seeing in pro-

spective bills, signed when she had hopes of being able to meet them, but which she now had no funds to take up, her days were troubled and her nights were sleepless. That her difficulties had arisen because of her efforts to help others, was slight comfort and scarce alleviated the weariness and strife which filled every hour of a life to which humiliation and sordidness were bitterness.

No wonder she wrote at this time 'Great trials demand great courage, and all our energy is called up to enable us to bear them. But it is the minor cares of life that wear out the body, because singly and in detail they do not appear sufficiently important to engage us to rally our force and spirits to support them. Many minds that have withstood the most severe trials, have been broken down by a succession of ignoble cares.'

Lady Blessington was resolved that no matter what sacrifices had to be made, her creditors should be fully paid: and if no other means of accomplishing this presented itself, she would break up the home which was dear to her, sell its possessions which were invaluable to her from associations, and settle abroad. Before taking this decisive step she would see if it were possible to be averted. She had contemplated it before, but the knowledge that it would sunder a thousand ties and connections dear to her, which at her time of life she could not hope to re-establish, had made her cling to her home.

From this year forward care was taken

to shut the door upon the bailiffs. The great gates were chained and locked, and when the outer bell announced a visitor, a stalwart figure issued from a side door to survey the caller, and the immediate neighbourhood. If the visitor were recognised as a friend of my lady, he was allowed to pass unchallenged; if he were unknown, his message or his card was received with some suspicion, and he shut out until her decision was known concerning him.

The while she continued to correspond with and to receive her old friends. In January of this year Charles Dickens writing to her from Paris says 'I feel very wicked in beginning this note, and deeply remorseful for not having begun and ended it long ago. But *you* know how difficult it is to write letters in the midst of a writing life; and as you know too (I hope) how earnestly and affectionately I always think of you wherever I am, I take heart on a little consideration and feel comparatively good again.'

He has been attending the theatres and seeing the sights of the French capital until he has begun to doubt whether he had anything to do with a book called *Dombey*, 'or ever sat over number five (not finished a fortnight yet) day after day, until I half began, like the monk in poor Wilkie's story, to think it the only reality in life, and to mistake all the realities for short-lived shadows.'

One Sunday evening in the following month the writer of this letter together with his eldest

son, Prince Louis Napoleon, Bulwer Lytton, and John Forster had assembled in the drawing-room of Gore House. The hostess who ever had something of interest to relate or exhibit, on this evening showed them a portrait in oils of a girl's face which she had received the previous day from her brother Robert, who was now filling a Government post in Hobart Town. The chief interest in the portrait was its having been painted by the celebrated poisoner Wainright, then undergoing his sentence of transportation, whom Dickens had once seen when visiting Newgate prison.

A strange thing about this picture was, that Wainright had contrived to paint into the face of the young girl an expression of his own wickedness; a point that gave Bulwer Lytton a theme for psychological discussion in which Dickens joined; both writers being intensely interested in this convict whose remarkable career had furnished each with a subject for a novel.

It was in 1847 that an event occurred which was much discussed by Lady Blessington's circle, this being the marriage of the Countess Guiccioli. In 1840 her lord had died, and for full seven years had she, if no longer radiant with youth, at least hallowed by association with Byron, waited for an adventurous swain to wed her. He arrived at last in the person of the Marquis de Boissy, an ancient man and a wealthy, a peer under Louis Philippe, and a philosopher, who devoted to his wife and proud of her *liaison* with a great poet,

was wont to introduce her to his friends as 'Madame le Marquise de Boissy *ma femme, ci-devant maîtresse de* Lord Byron.'

It may here be mentioned that Madame Guiccioli had years before become a spiritist, and received the assurance that 'she had prayed so much for Lord Byron, he had become elevated to an exalted state in heaven.' It is creditable to one whose faithfulness was not his strongest characteristic on earth, that he did not forget the Guiccioli on attaining realms of bliss; for he frequently communicated with her, using her hand for the purpose, and writing in the French language, a task he had been unable to accomplish when his education was less advanced here below.

Another event which more nearly touched the inmates of Gore House happened in 1848, when by the dethronement of Louis Philippe and the proclamation of a Republic in France, Prince Louis appeared upon the scene, was returned by five Departments to the Assembly, and later was chosen President of the Republic by five and a half million votes.

It was in January 1849, a few months after Prince Louis had become President, that Lady Blessington received a letter from Landor containing a prediction, and enclosing two articles clipped from the *Examiner*, which he thinks she may not have seen. He tells her he had written another 'deprecating the anxieties which a truly patriotic, and in my opinion, a singularly wise man, was about to encounter in accepting the Presidency of France. Necessity

will compel him to assume the Imperial power, to which the voice of the army and people will call him.

'You know (who know not only my writings but my heart) how little I care for station. I may therefore tell you safely that I feel a great interest, a great anxiety, for the welfare of Louis Napoleon. I told him if ever he were again in prison, I would visit him there; but never if he were upon a throne would I come near him. He is the only man living who would adorn one, but thrones are my aversion and abhorrence. God protect the virtuous Louis Napoleon, and prolong in happiness the days of my dear kind friend Lady Blessington. I wrote a short letter to the President, and not of congratulation. May he find many friends as disinterested and sincere.'

A few days previous to the receipt of Landor's letter, Disraeli wrote her a note dated from Hughendon Manor into which he had just moved. In this he says he has taken 'the liberty of telling Moxon to send you a copy of the new edit. of the *Curiosts: of Li:* wh. I have just published, with a little notice of my father. You were always so kind to him, & he entertained such a sincere regard for you, that I thought you w^{d} not dislike to have this copy on y^{r} shelves.

'I found among his papers some verses wh.: you sent him on his 80th birthday, wh.: I mean to publish some day, with his correspondence; but the labor now is too great for my jaded life.

'My wife complains very much that I broke my promise to her, & did not bring her to pay you a visit when we last passed thro' town; but I was as great a sufferer by that omission as herself. The truth is, I am always hurried to death & quite worn out chiefly by statistics, tho' I hope the great Californian discovery, by revolutionizing all existing data, will finally blow up these impostures & their votaries of all parties.

'We have passed the last six weeks in moving from Bradenham to this place—a terrible affair, especially for the library, tho' only a few miles. I seem to have lived in waggons like a Tartar chief. Would I were really one, but this is a life of trial, & Paradise, I hope, is a land where there are neither towns nor country.

'Our kindest regards to you all,' etc.

Meanwhile every week that passed increased Lady Blessington's difficulties until there seemed no longer any hope that her debts could be paid save by breaking up her home and selling all she possessed. By this time her health had almost broken down under the strain of anxious days and sleepless nights. At the end of March 1849, suspense was ended and matters brought to a crisis, when a sheriff's officer by strategy effected an entrance to Gore House with an execution put in by Howell & James for a considerable sum. It was now hourly feared that a host of other creditors would descend upon her. Count D'Orsay could no longer find refuge within

her gates from the bailiff. Immediate action was necessary.

No sooner therefore did Lady Blessington learn of the entrance of the sheriff's officer, than she sent for D'Orsay, and the result of their consultation was that he and his valet left Gore House that night for Paris. Before following him Lady Blessington remained until various arrangements were made. By effecting a life insurance for a large amount, which she handed to the most importunate of her creditors, her debts were reduced to about fifteen hundred pounds, a sum she felt sure would be more than covered by the sale of furniture, pictures, objects of art, and jewels.

It is creditable to human nature, of which much good cannot be stated, to know that several friends offered her such assistance as even at this late hour would have prevented the necessity of breaking up her home; but all such kindnesses were gratefully but firmly declined by one who through life had preferred rather to give than to receive.

Having placed Gore House in the hands of an auctioneer, she and her nieces quitted this scene of her labours, the home that had witnessed so many brilliant gatherings, the place she had made beautiful with objects dear to her from association. Leaving forever what had become part of herself was a wrench that filled a sensitive nature like hers with exquisite pain. A trial more grievous still was saying farewell to friends; yet in

this she did not spare herself. Amongst others she wrote to John Forster on the 9th of April saying 'As I purpose leaving England in a few days, it will pain me very much to depart without personally wishing you farewell; and though I am in all the fever of packing up, I will make time to receive a visit from you, if you can call any day this week about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, or after nine in the evening. Count D'Orsay was called to Paris so suddenly, that he had not time to take leave of any of his friends, but he charged me to say a thousand kind things to you.' Within a week from the time this letter was written she had left England forever.

Her departure left a melancholy blank in the lives of her numerous friends which no other woman could supply; whilst her ready sympathy, her cheerfully given aid, her kindly words were sadly missed by those whom she long had helped. The slander which had poisoned her life was now almost forgotten in the general sympathy for her misfortunes. A censorious world began to wonder if it had really wronged her; if its judgments could be mistaken. 'Those who knew her best' says William Archer Shee writing at this date 'find it difficult to believe her to be utterly devoid of all the better instincts of her sex, and recognise much in her character as it appeared to them in their social moments under her roof, that marked the woman of generous impulses and refined tastes and feel-

ings. The *habitués* of Seamore Place and Gore House will always look back on the evenings spent there with grateful remembrances of her who knew how to attract to her *salons* all that was most conspicuous in London male society, whether in art, science, literature, the senate or the forum. No one was more competent than she, to appreciate the talents of those she gathered round her, who on their part, one and all did justice to her own brilliant qualities.'

And N. P. Willis writing at a time when she could no longer read his words, of the position she held towards D'Orsay, says 'All who knew her and her son-in-law were satisfied that it was a useful and indeed an absolutely necessary arrangement for him—her strict business habits, practical good sense, and the protection of her roof being an indispensable safeguard to his personal liberty and fortunes —and that this need of serving him, and the strongest and most disinterested friendship were her only motives, everyone was completely sure who knew them at all. By those intimate at her house, including the best and greatest men of England, Lady Blessington was held in unqualified respect, and no shadow even of suspicion thrown over her life of widowhood.'

Gore House having been placed in the hands of Phillips the auctioneer, he issued a notice that on Monday the 7th of May and for twelve subsequent days would take place the sale of her household furniture, her library,

consisting of five thousand volumes, her pictures, porcelain, plate, and a casket of valuable jewellery. For three days previous to the auction the house could be viewed by the purchasers of catalogues issued at three shillings each; one catalogue admitting two persons. During those three days not less than twenty thousand persons visited the house.

The gates that had shut out many a bailiff, were now flung wide. The approach to the house was as the entrance to a fair. The vestibule was occupied by brokers, Jews, and bailiffs, a large number of the same fraternity being scattered over the rooms inside. The carpets were up, but pictures yet hung upon the walls, costly china stood upon brackets and mantelpieces, the furniture was in its accustomed place, all of which were examined by a curious throng. Lady Jersey, at the head of a bevy of fine ladies, loitered through one apartment after another, scrutinising all things, something of scorn in their remarks, sarcastic smiles on their lips: furniture dealers examined chairs and tables; presentation volumes were dragged from their shelves, opened, thumbed, and read: picture dealers examined paintings and prints, speculating regarding the probable prices they would fetch; groups of idlers, and eager sightseers gazed at the rooms where so many famous people had met, men in baize aprons and paper caps hurried to and fro; sounds of hammering came from rooms upstairs, heard above the confusion caused by a hundred tongues. And over all

was a sense of desolation, an air of desecration, an appearance of downfall, pitiful to feel and to see: one that brought tears to the eyes of William Makepeace Thackeray, as François Avillon, one of Lady Blessington's servants, wrote to his mistress.

Her belongings were sold to advantage. Her portrait painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence for which he had received eighty guineas, was knocked down for £336 to Lord Hertford, who also bought the portrait of the Duke of Wellington by D'Orsay, for £189. A sketch by Landseer of Miss Power brought £57; whilst the same artist's picture of a spaniel was sold for £150. The net sum realised by the sale amounted to close upon twelve thousand pounds which covered Lady Blessington's debts.

Meanwhile she and her nieces having reached Paris stayed at the Hôtel de la Ville l'Evêque, until they could find a suitable *appartement.* The step long contemplated had been taken and relief had followed: for if a wrench was made a burden was laid aside. She was no longer fretted by a thousand cares and fears; her doors were darkened no more by anxious creditors; a sense of freedom and calm fell upon her; and her wonder was that years before she had not sought escape from her troubles. She had her jointure of two thousand a year which was now being regularly paid, and she intended to continue her literary work, in the hope that it might aid her income.

Moreover it was believed that D'Orsay who to some extent depended on her, would soon receive a position suitable to his station and talents from Prince Louis, who in this way would no doubt strive to make some return for the kindness and hospitality he had for years received from the inmates of Gore House. This however was a hope not destined to be speedily fulfilled. On hearing of Lady Blessington's arrival, the Prince had invited her and her nieces to call on him at the Elysée, and later asked them and Count D'Orsay to dinner. But the manner and bearing of the President was not that of the refugee: a punctilious politeness emphasising rather than concealing the difference in his feelings towards old friends and kind hosts; a difference which cut to the quick the generous, warm-hearted woman to whom he owed so much.

Fortunately others were truer and kinder. The Guiccioli, now Marquise de Boissy called at once upon her old friend, at whose disposal she placed her carriage, and whom she continually invited to her home. Many of those whom she had known during her residence in Paris, hastened to renew their acquaintance with Lady Blessington; whilst the members of D'Orsay's family, showed her every sympathy and kindness possible. Nor did her old friends in England fail to remember her. In the numerous letters she received from them, one and all expressed their profound regret at her departure, whilst

many hoped for her ultimate return amongst them.

A few days after she left London Disraeli wrote to her 'We returned to town on the 16th and a few days after I called at Gore House, but you were gone. It was a pang; for though absorbing duties of my life have prevented me of late from passing as much ime under that roof as it was once my happiness and good fortune through your kindness to do; you are well assured that my heart never changed for an instant to its inmates, and that I invariably entertained for them the same interest and affection.

'Had I been aware of your intentions, I would have come up to town earlier, and especially to have said "adieu" mournful as that is.

'I thought I should never pay another visit to Paris, but I have now an object in doing so. All the world here will miss you very much, and the charm with which you invested existence; but for your own happiness, I am persuaded you have acted wisely. Every now and then in this life we require a great change; it wonderfully revives the sense of existence. I envy you; pray if possible let me sometimes hear from you.'

And Henry Bulwer writing to her on the 6th of May says 'I was very glad to get your letter. I never had a doubt (I judged by myself) that your friends would remain always your friends, and I was sure that many who were not Alfred's when he was away, would

become so when he was present. It would be great ingratitude if Prince Louis forgot former kindnesses and services, and I must say that I do not think him capable of this.

'I think you will take a house in Paris or near it, and I hope some day there to find you, and to renew some of the many happy hours I have spent in your society.'

After several weeks of searching she eventually found an *appartement* suitable for herself and her nieces, in the Rue du Cerq, not far from the Champs Elysée. In furnishing and decorating her new home, she found exercise for the taste that had ever distinguished her, and escape from the thoughts of her recent worries. A new life which promised fair opened before her, and with it she began new habits, for she now rose much earlier than was her wont, and she took more exercise than she had done for years; the result being that she seemed in happier spirits and in better health.

Indeed she would have considered herself quite well if it were not that in the mornings before rising, she began to suffer from oppression and difficulty of breathing. As she always had an objection to medical treatment, she not only concealed these symptons from her nieces but would have ignored them herself, did they not rapidly increase, when at last a doctor was summoned, who on examining her said there was *énérgie de cœur*, but that the unpleasantness from which she suffered

was probably due to bronchitis, and that no danger need be feared. Remedies were prescribed, the attacks became less frequent, and her general health seemed good.

After having spent seven weeks at the hotel, she removed to her new home on the 3d of June. On the evening of that day she dined *en famille* with the Duc and Duchesse de Guiche, D'Orsay's nephew and his wife. The party was quiet and enjoyable, and none seemed in better spirits than Lady Blessington. As the night was deliciously warm, and almost as bright as day, the moon being near to the full, she proposed to walk the short distance that separated her from her home.

She passed a sleepless night and early in the morning, feeling that one of her attacks were inevitable, she called for assistance. The doctor was immediately summoned, but before his arrival the difficulty of breathing became excessive, she gasped at the air, and her extremities grew gradually cold. The remedies which had been recommended were tried and after a time she was enabled to mutter the words 'The violence is over, I can breathe freer.' After a little while she asked what hour it was. The doctor then arrived and a glance showed him that for her, life was over. She sank into a sleep so tranquil that none might say at what moment her spirit took flight.

Two days later the autopsy took place when it was seen that the heart had become

enlarged to nearly double its natural size, a growth which it was considered had been progressing for twenty-five years, and was now the cause of her death. The body was then embalmed and placed in the vaults of the Madeleine there to remain until the mausoleum which D'Orsay set himself to construct, would be ready.

To all her frineds her death came as a shock and a grief; for each knew there was no replacing her; that the blank they felt could not be filled. None missed her gracious presence, the kindness and sympathy she had ever expressed in her letters, more than Landor, yet he mournfully asks 'Why call her death sad? It was the very mode of departure she anticipated and desired; as I do too.'

In due time a massive mausoleum of granite in the shape of a pyramid, was erected by D'Orsay in the churchyard of Chambourcy, près de St German-en-Laye. It stands on a square platform on a level with the surrounding ground but divided from it by a deep *fosse*, whose sloping sides are covered with turf and ivy transplanted from the garden of the house in which she was born. The interior contained two stone sarcophagi, standing side by side, in one of which was placed the remains of Lady Blessington, the other being destined by D'Orsay for himself. On the wall above were two white marble tablets, each containing an inscription, written by two of Lady Blessington's friends.

The first runs as follows:—

In Memory of

MARGUERITE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON,

WHO DIED ON THE 4TH OF JUNE 1849.

IN HER LIFETIME
SHE WAS LOVED AND ADMIRED
FOR HER MANY GRACEFUL WRITINGS,
HER GENTLE MANNERS, HER KIND AND GENEROUS
HEART.
MEN, FAMOUS FOR ART AND SCIENCE
IN DISTANT LANDS
SOUGHT HER FRIENDSHIP
AND THE HISTORIANS AND SCHOLARS, THE POETS,
AND WITS, AND PAINTERS,
OF HER OWN COUNTRY,
FOUND AN UNFAILING WELCOME
IN HER EVER HOSPITABLE HOME.
SHE GAVE CHEERFULLY TO ALL WHO WERE IN NEED,
HELP AND SYMPATHY AND USEFUL COUNSEL;
AND SHE DIED
LAMENTED BY HER FRIENDS.
THEY WHO LOVED HER BEST IN LIFE AND NOW
LAMENT HER MOST,
HAVE RAISED THIS TRIBUTARY MARBLE
OVER THE PLACE OF HER REST.

BARRY CORNWALL.

The second inscription was written in Latin by Landor; the English version of the words being 'To the Memory of Marguerite Countess of Blessington. Underneath lies all that could be interred of a once beautiful woman. Her own genius she cultivated with zeal, in others she fostered its growth with equal assiduity. The benefits she conferred she could conceal, but not her talents. Elegant in her hospitality to strangers, she was charitable to all. She retired to Paris where she breathed her last on the 4th of April 1849.'

Her loss to Count D'Orsay was beyond measure, and his grief was profound. 'In losing her' he would exclaim over and over again 'I have lost everything in the world; for she was to me a mother, a dear mother, a true and loving mother.' It was a blow from which he never recovered.

To the sorrow he felt for her, was added the vexation he experienced at the President's ingratitude, for month after month passed and no diplomatic office was given him who was sorely in need of an employment which would have occupied his mind and afforded him independence. Meanwhile he hired a large studio to which was attached some rooms, and here he lived and worked, seeing only the members of his family and a few intimate friends.

In many ways he had become a changed man, for not only had his old gaiety deserted him, his love of dress and display and company vanished, but it was evident his health was suffering. It was not however until the